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REYNOLDS HISTORICAL  
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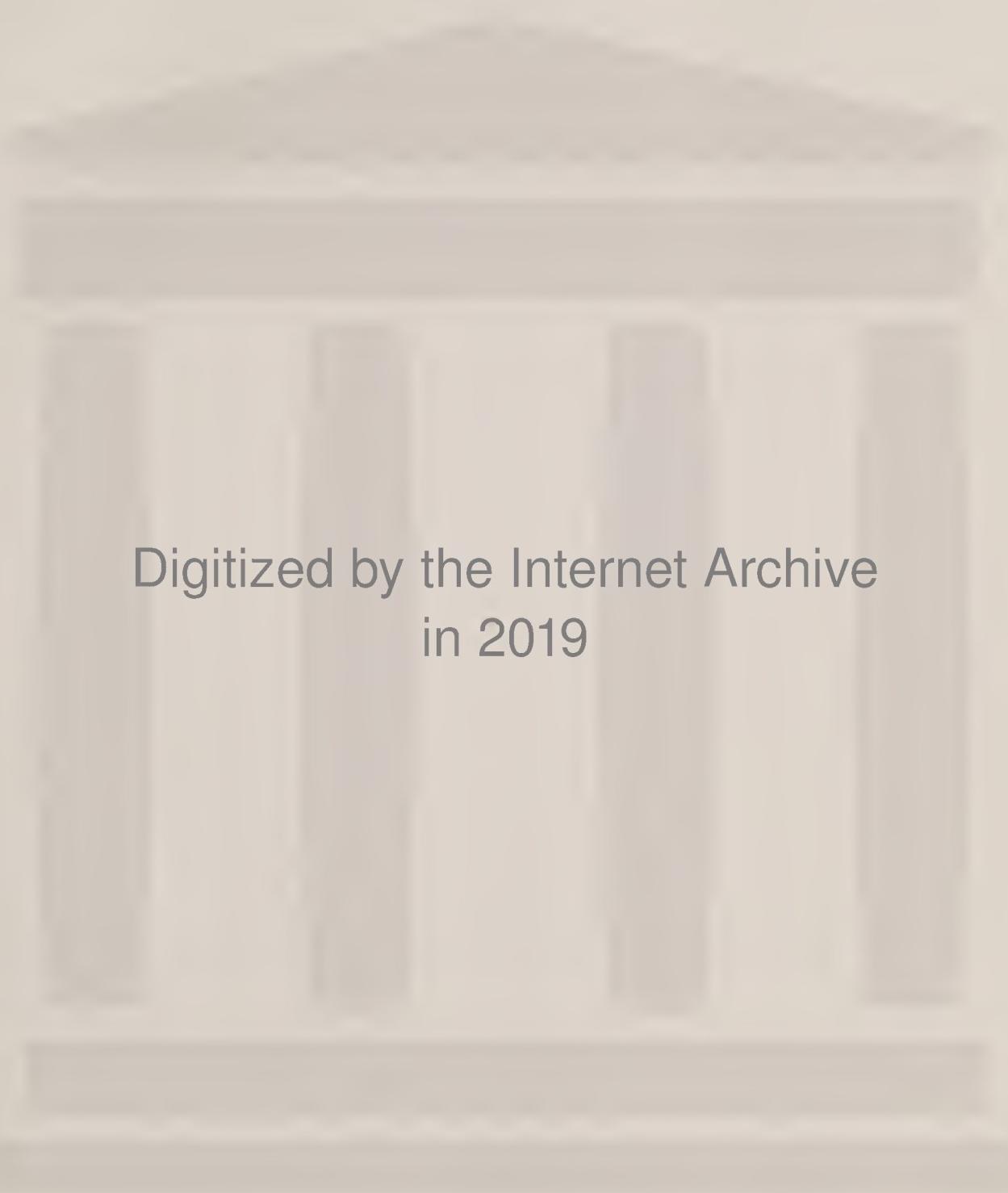
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PENCOYD  
and  
THE ROBERTS FAMILY

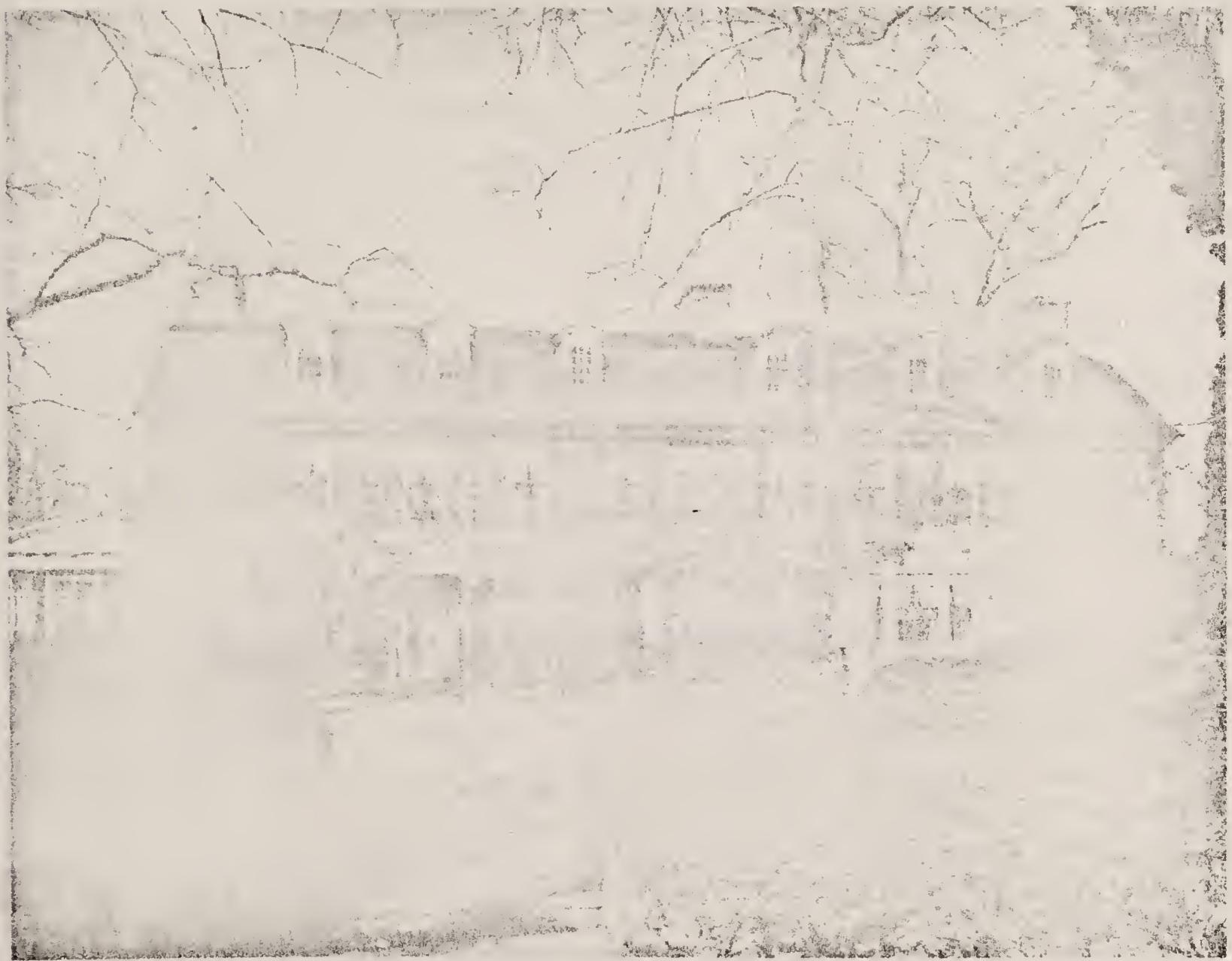
by David Loth

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1686676



Pencoyd in 1960. The section on the left, taking in the three left dormer windows, is the original stone house built by John Roberts in 1684.



This book is affectionately dedicated to  
Uncle Wib  
the present proprietor of Pencoyd  
by his nieces and nephews who spent so many  
happy hours playing in the old gardens and barns.



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# Introduction

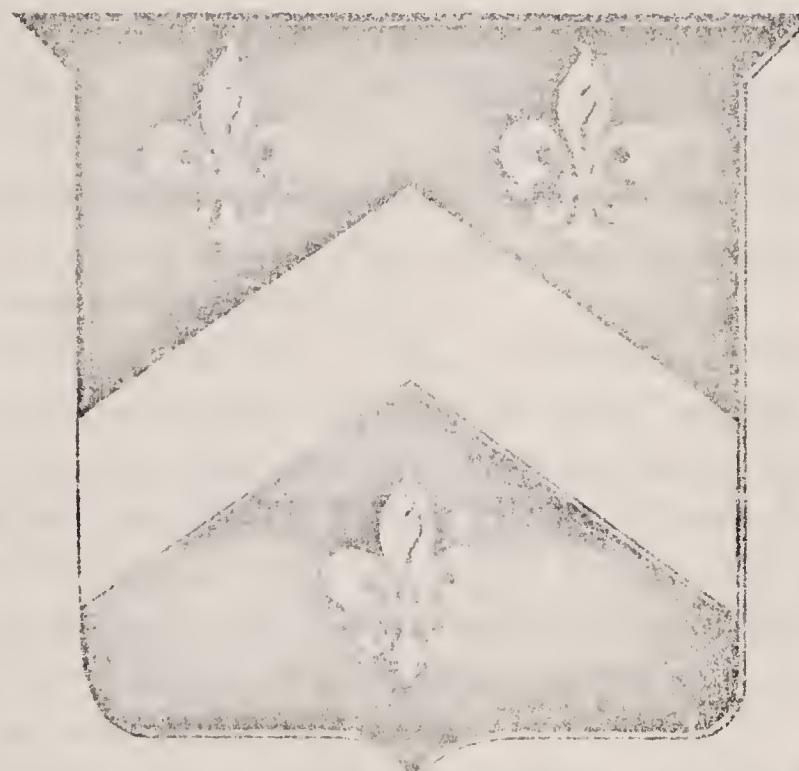
On an autumn day in 1683 John Roberts, newly arrived from Bala in Wales, first saw the Pennsylvania land he had purchased before he left England. Beside a clear spring on a fine, rolling tract stretching back from the Schuylkill River, beautifully timbered, well watered, fertile, he built a house commanding a view of his own acres and — just beyond to the southeast — of Netopcum, an Indian encampment.

Two hundred and seventy-five years — and nine generations — later, John Roberts' great-great-great-great-grandson, aged five, gazed in wonder and delight from this same house beside the same spring at feathered Indians strolling about in the direction of Netopcum. These costumed figures were better evidence of mighty changes than of the immutability of time; they were part of a "western" being broadcast from WCAU-TV. The big modern structure which houses the television station is just one of the office buildings and apartment houses which have been built on what was John Roberts' farm, bringing the city of Philadelphia, once a long six miles distant, to his very door.

Through all the changes a Roberts has lived here. Rare in the history of American families, the place has descended from father to son in the direct male line without a break. Seven generations have built and rebuilt, tilled the soil, raised children. The stone walls, screened by old trees and thick shrubs, almost but not quite shut out the encroachments of modern life. The following pages attempt to tell the story of this place, named Pencoyd, and the successive generations of Robertses who have lived in the old house.



## Coat of Arms



Columyn ap Tango  
Founder of the Noble Tribe of North Wales  
and direct ancestor of the Roberts Family  
of Pencoyd in Merion, Pennsylvania.



# Chapter I

## John Roberts, First Proprietor (1648-1724)

The lineage of John Roberts has been traced to Colwyn ap Tagno, that Lord of LLyn in the Eleventh Century whose descendants have been described as "always the best men in Eifionydd and Arduudwy." Roberts also was in the tenth generation of descent from one Ieuan ap Rhys, who about 1450 was living on an estate with a name written by contemporaries as PenKoed, in Carnarvonshire.

Nearly everything else known about John Roberts before he decided to come to America is contained in a one-page "account . . . left to my posterity" in his own hand and still preserved in the family home. Here he wrote that his grandfather, Robert Thomas Morris, lived at Cowyn in the parish of Llanengan. After the Welsh fashion, this gentleman's son took his father's first name for his own surname, and was known as Richard Roberts. He married Margaret Evans and our John Roberts was born to them about the year 1648.

These Robertses were members of the Welsh gentry, belonging apparently to the moderately well-to-do freeholding class of landowners. At the age of 29, John's "account" relates, he became "convinced of God's Everlasting Truth . . . not by man nor through man but by ye revelation of Jesus Christ in my own heart . . ." In other words he joined the Quakers, the persecuted sect founded by George Fox about the year John was born.

On making the acquaintance of Friends near Dolgella and Bala in Merionethshire, he says he "frequented their meetings while I abode in these parts." In the lake region of Bala, noted for the beauty of its scenery and its people, he made friends with such leading Welsh Quakers as Dr. Edward Jones, John ap Thomas, Hugh Robert and Hugh's sister Gaynor. There was a satisfying communion of kindred spirits, but by the time John Roberts had been a member of their Meeting for four years, Friends all over England were beginning to think of some escape from the frequent unpredictable jailings and fines to which they were subjected. Many of them looked to a courtier who was one of their own, William Penn, son of an Admiral to whom the English Crown was in-



debted for £16,000. In 1680, Penn obtained the grant of a province in full settlement — Pennsylvania — and within a year had sent out a governor while he circulated a prospectus, "Concessions or Constitutions," describing the sanctuary he proposed to establish for Friends everywhere.

Freedom from informers and jailers was only one attraction. Penn also gave figures to show what a man with £100 to invest might expect in the new Utopia. An estate of 500 acres, the prospectus assured him, could be paid for with the profits (50%) realized from the sale of articles brought over with the new settler. So, assuming he came with wife, child and two manservants, the first year's expenses would be:

"To Passage and Cloaths .....	£38.02.06
To House and Barn .....	15.10.00
To living expenses one year .....	17.17.06
To Stock .....	24.10.00
<hr/>	
	£96.00.00"

At the end of the year, the rosy balance sheet was supposed to read:

"Crop valued at .....	£ 59.10.00
House & Barn .....	30.00.00*
Stock, cost .....	24.10.00
Land (15 acres improved) .....	26.05.00
Remaining cash .....	4.00.00
<hr/>	
	£144.05.00"

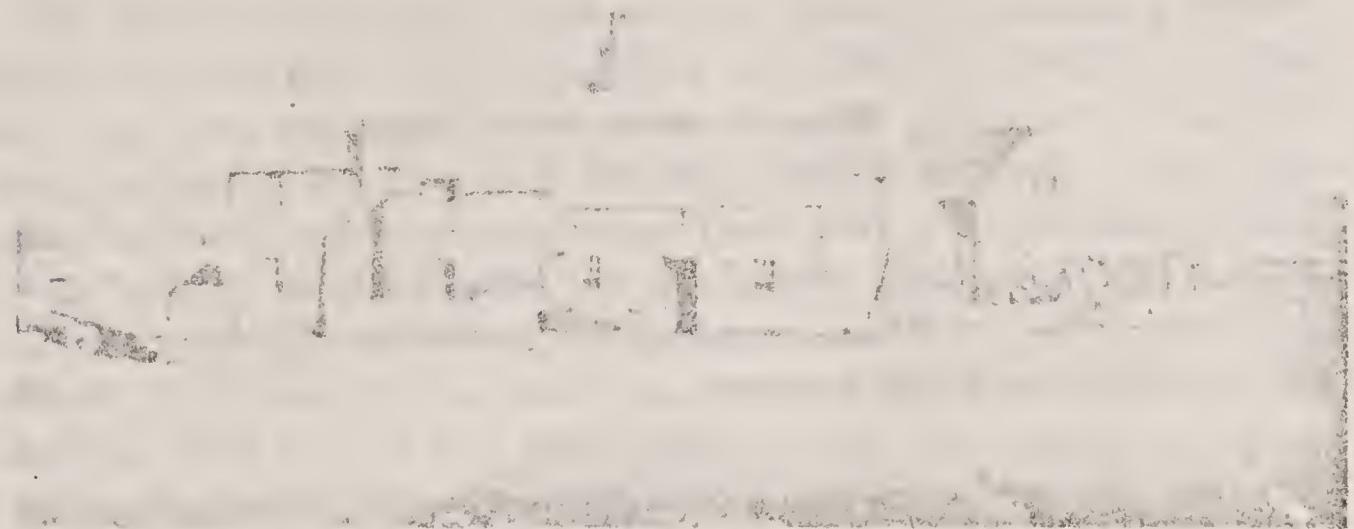
This document was keenly discussed by Quakers who attended the annual fair at St. Peter's in Bala during the second week in July that year of 1681. The fair drew visitors from distant shires, from the valley of the Twrch, through the terrible pass at Bwlch, and the vale of Edevinion skirting the River Dee. A good many were "Children of the Light," as Fox's followers sometimes called themselves. One of them, Thomas John Evans, left Bala for London and America forthwith, probably the first Welsh settler in Pennsylvania. Others preferred to wait until they heard from a delegation which conferred with Penn late in the year. It included Dr. Thomas Wynne, Dr. Edward Jones, Dr. Griffith Owen, John ap Thomas, Richard Davies and Edward Prichard.

They wanted a single large tract of land where they and their friends could settle together in a sort of "barony" with certain autonomous rights including the holding of courts in the Welsh language. They thought they had Penn's assurance on this point, and they bought

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\*An early example of the wonderful American rise in residential values.





*John Roberts' house in Llanengan, Wales, as it was in the 1950s, photographed by his descendant, Ronland E. Roberts. Occupied by another John Roberts (no kinsman) it is said locally to look much as it did when Roberts of Pencoyd left it for America in 1683.*

warrants as trustees for five different but affiliated groups. The total tract was 40,000 acres. Richard Davies of Welshpool, a celebrated minister or "Public Friend," represented John Roberts. Hugh Roberts, also a brilliant minister, and his sister, Gaynor, were purchasers in the "company" of Dr. Edward Jones and John ap Thomas.

Preparations for the emigration were pushed. Dr. Jones with his family and a few friends to make a party of forty persons set off as an advance guard in the late spring of 1682, even before Penn himself. On the last day of July, 1682\*, John Roberts received a deed from Davies for 150 acres in Pennsylvania, but the price is not stated. (However, Gaynor Robert paid £3.26 for her 156.5 acres.) The purchaser is described as "of the parish of Llangian . . . gentleman." Llangian adjoins John Roberts' grandfather's parish on the Llyn promontory.

Several months later, the intending settlers heard from Dr. Jones, who wrote an enthusiastic description of the new land to John ap Thomas. The Jones group found a crowd clamoring for land but after some difficulty succeeded in having theirs located on the west bank of the Schuylkill near the falls.

"I hope it will please thee," Dr. Jones wrote, "for it hath the most rare timber, I have not seen the like in all these parts, there is water

\*In this chapter all dates are "Old Style" since until 1752 England and her colonies customarily used the Julian calendar which began the new year on March 25 and in addition was eleven days behind the reformed or Gregorian calendar in use now. Thus January 10, 1683, would be January 21, 1684, by our reckoning.



enough besides. The end of each lot will be on a river as large or larger than the Dye [Dee] at Bala."

The soil, he added, was "good and fat" generally producing twenty-thirty- or forty-fold. Stone for building was plentiful especially near the falls, and there was ample water power for mills. Thomas was urged to bring millstones and iron tools because "Smiths are dear." The Jones party had fared well as to provisions. There were a few Swedish settlers in the vicinity who provided the newcomers with venison and milk. (Swedes originally colonized Pennsylvania and New Jersey and incidentally introduced the log cabin to America, but were ousted by the Dutch in 1654 who in turn were taken over by the English in 1664.) Indians also proved friendly, supplying venison at sixpence "ye quarter."

At this time Philadelphia existed only on paper: its earliest settlers came over with Penn that same year, living mostly in caves along the river banks the first winter. In England fears of civil war speeded emigrant plans, for late in 1682 plans for an insurrection by the Earl of Shaftsbury were discovered and in April, 1683, a plot for the assassination of the King and his brother was exposed.

"By ye province of God," John Roberts wrote in his account for his descendants, "in the year 1683 I transported myself in company with many of my friends for Pennsylvania."

The rush was so great that some Quaker communities in Wales were almost entirely depopulated. It was the custom to provide any traveling Friend with a certificate of good conduct and recommendation from his own Meeting, and on July 18, 1683, fifteen members of the Men's Meeting at Penllan signed a paper which stated that John Roberts had "received the truth" and added:

"Hath walked since blameless in his conversation and serviceable in his place. Also that he is free from all contracts of marriage and matrimony, to a certain knowledge of good reputation amongst his neighbors, acquaintances and relations where he lived."

A similarly worded certificate was signed that same day for Gaynor Robert, among others. She and her brother were among the passengers with Roberts and his manservant on the *Morning Star*, Thomas Hayes master, when that ship sailed from Chester in September.

It was November 14, 1683, before the *Morning Star* cleared the mouth of the Delaware: November 16 when her passengers came ashore at the infant city of Philadelphia. The season was late and the weather cold, so that many of the new arrivals spent the winter in the town. But hardier ones, including Roberts and his servant, seem to have begun work on their land at once. Apparently he erected a log shelter, for on the outside rear wall of his stone house are the remains of early



WILLIAM PENN made the sixteenth a. Day of September in the year of our Lord One thousand six hundred forty and one - and in the Queen and Thirteenth year of the Reign of King Charles the Second over England &c Betweene William Penn of Wormington in County of Suffex Esq; of the out-pat and John Pen of Penrhyn in County of Denbigh Head and Broad Lord of Gava in the same County Esquire on xxv or of the other part  
**WITNESSETH** that the said William Penn for and in consideration of the summe of five thousand of lawfull  
 of England to him in hand paid by the said John Thomas and Edward Jones the Receipt whereof he doth hereby acknowledge  
 Hath bargained and sold and by these presents doth Bargaine and sell unto the said John Thomas & Edward Jones The  
 just proportion and quantity of three thousands are xxoo xxoo xxoo acres of Land every where to be adme  
 and computed according to the Enclosure of Land mentioned and apponited in and by the Statute made in the  
 Thirtieth year of the Reign of King Edward the first Intituled hym and knowne within the Province of Pr  
 the said three thousands were alloted and sett out in such places or parts of the said L  
 manner and at such tyme or tymes as by Certaine Commission or Constitution before date of  
 Day of July last past xxoo xxoo xxoo And signed sealed and executed by and betwene  
 one part and the said John Thomas & Edward Jones and the other Proprietors of Lands within the  
 shewnd of the settling and executing of these presents are witness signified and  
 Seal'd and Executed by and betwene the same parties shall be accounted by  
 Rulz and premisses of the said three thousands are xxoo acres and a      Detail from  
 to hold the said three thousand aea ares herem intituled and      the deed, pre  
 very of their appurtenances unto the said John Thomas & Edward Jones      served at Pencoyd,  
 day of the date Recd for and during and into the full end a      by which William Penn  
 in 1681 transferred 5,000  
 acres of the Welsh Tract to the Edward Jones Company, of which John  
 Roberts was a member.

mud plaster where a log building stood. His 150 acres, a relatively long, narrow strip running from the river westward with its southern boundary on what became City Line, was the plot nearest to Philadelphia in the Welsh Tract or Welsh Barony. There were probably a few clearings made by the Indians in his woods — most of the area was dotted with them — and the trees were all that Dr. Jones had described.

In his own account, Roberts skipped lightly over the first year to report that after establishing himself "in the place where afterwards I called Pencoid\* in ye township of Meirion . . . being ye first settlers of it . . . and fixing my setling here I tooke to wife Gaynor Robert daughter to Robert Pugh from Llwyndedwydd near Bala in meirionethshire her mother being Elizabeth William Owen one of ye first that was convinced of truth in that neighborhood."

The Pennsylvania township obviously was named for the shire from which so many of its members came; Roberts' own farm was called after the estate of his ancestors in Wales: the name means "head of the woods." Even while he was clearing his fields during the first spring, he began building his stone house, and the custom was to have the carpenters and masons out from Philadelphia to live on the place until the job was done. The walls of gray field-stone and the hard flint from which Indians made their arrowheads were almost two feet thick. They enclosed a roomy house for that day, measuring roughly thirty by forty-

\*The letters "i" and "y" were used interchangeably. Eventually the farm became Pencoyd, the name of daughters of the house Gainor.



five feet, although the walls do not square at one end by at least a foot. There were two and a half stories with a staircase rising through the center. Rafters and floors were from timber cut on the farm. The kitchen was a separate but adjoining building, perhaps the log house in which he and his servant had lived their first winter; that was a fairly common practice with new settlers. For some time there was no stable or barn, Roberts' cows being staked out or tethered to trees with grape-vines, a handy substitute for the very expensive ropes from England.

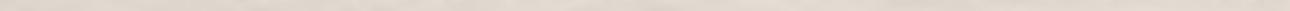
The wedding of John and Gaynor Roberts on March 20, 1634, was the first held in the Merion Meeting. Whether or not it took place in a vanished predecessor to the Meeting House which still stands is disputed by Pennsylvania historians. Some think there was a building that early; others argue that there was none before the present structure was started in 1695, until which time Meeting was held in various homes. In any case there were at least twenty-three wedding guests, for that many signed the marriage certificate as witnesses. The bride rode pillion behind her minister brother, for as yet there was not a single carriage in the Welsh Tract; for some years there were not more than three in the whole province.

The Welsh settlers of Merion, however, were a cut above most of the Pennsylvania immigrants in both education and personal property. While other parts of the Tract were peopled by families speaking nothing but Welsh, members of the Jones and Davies groups were just as fluent in English. They brought books with them, too; among those in John Roberts' library were "The Works of the Long-Mournful and Sorely-distressed Isaac Pennington" and "The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation," by Edward Burroughs, "who dyed a Prisoner for the Word of God in the City of London 14/12/1662." Roberts also owned works by William Penn, and Bibles in both English and Welsh, still preserved in his home.

On Pencoyd both wheat and Indian corn were raised but the principal crop seems to have been barley. Roberts paid surveyor's fees in this grain, for instance — one of his receipts was for 35 bushels at 4s. 6d. the bushel — and very early was a manufacturer of malt, which is made from barley. In the records of the time, in fact, he is called Maltster; it was one way of distinguishing him from another John Roberts in the Welsh Tract who was a miller. Malt was one of the necessities of life then; every family needed it to make beer, an almost universal drink.

Although most of his neighbors were Welsh, there was one Englishman in the area, William Warner. Tradition assigns him a captaincy in the Parliamentary Army during the English Civil War; he came to





*The Welsh Church in Llanengan, built in the Sixth Century.  
In its graveyard lie a number of Robertses and other ancestors  
of settlers in Pennsylvania's Welsh Tract.*

Pennsylvania by way of New England after the Restoration and bought land from the Indians just south of what was to be the Welsh Tract. He named his estate Blockley, the English place of his origin. In the neighborhood, too, were a few Swedish families, that of Andries, or Andrew, Wheeler adjoining Pencoyd to the south.

The Welsh brought to the banks of the Schuylkill their songs, and "The Men of Harlech" and "All Through the Night" resounded as they sang at their harvesting. They brought too their fanciful legends — that illness could be cured by going between the forks of a split tree, that horned cattle prayed on their knees at midnight of Christmas Eve, that houses are haunted and ghosts walk lonely roads.

Only about one-eighth of the Welsh Tract was occupied that first year, but new arrivals soon brought the figure to more than half. There were many others coming to the haven of Pennsylvania too — 1683 saw the first Rhine immigrants, founders of Germantown, although they actually were Dutch Quakers, descendants of refugees who had fled long ago from the Netherlands. Philadelphia grew so fast that it was hard for farmers on the outskirts to keep up with it. There were 500 people in 1683 and 2500 by the end of the next year. Early in 1684 one could count 357 houses; the number grew to 600 in 1685 but there was a housing shortage. That meant a good market, though, and Roberts prospered. About ten years after he took up his land, an assessment of estates for tax purposes was made in Merion Township, and only one man's property was valued higher. That was his brother-in-law's, Hugh Robert, at £150. Roberts' was £120 as was one other estate. All the rest were £100 or less. The tax, incidentally, was a penny in the pound — equal to about 40 cents per \$100.

Pencoyd soon consisted of more than the original 150 acres. The exact boundaries of the estate at various times are impossible to locate



now. John Roberts, like most of the Welsh settlers, bought, sold and traded land and the old deeds do not always survive. In the ones that do, the key points, "an old hickory tree" or "a stone" have long since vanished. Apparently his earliest trade was a deal by which his wife's land was relocated to adjoin his. Originally it should have been next to that of her brother, some distance to the west, but in a map purporting to show this section of the Welsh Tract twenty years after its first settlement, her property is shown just west of her husband's along City Line. He also had bought 60 acres across that line, in what became Blockley Township, from Andrew Wheeler, and in 1687 from Hugh John and Cadwalader Morgan, 78 acres next to his original holding but to the north of it. Some time before 1700 he bought land rights to wilderness property — 750 acres far away in Chester County at Goshen — and later he had another 250 acres there. In 1709 he was paying taxes on this and on 225 acres in Merion as well as the 60 in Blockley (but tax records, deeds and surveys do not always agree in these matters). About that time, too, he sold a two-acre plot of "ye Mill lands" between the falls and lowest ford of the Schuylkill to his rival maltster, Anthony Morris 2d. whose malt house and brewery on Front Street, Philadelphia, began the oldest business in America; established in 1687, it is famous in business history as The Francis Perot's Sons Malting Company.

William Penn had established an almost Utopian form of government, and for three-quarters of a century it was dominated in all its branches by his fellow-religionists. But it did not prevent serious differences of opinion, and one of the earliest concerned the Welsh settlers who thought they had been promised autonomy for their "Barony." They refused to hold office or serve on juries outside of it, and in 1688 twenty-one of the leading citizens joined in a petition setting forth their claim that as descendants of "Antient Britains" they had always "enjoyed that liberty and privilege to have our bounds and limits by ourselves, without which all causes, quarrels, crimes and titles were tryed and wholly determined by officers, magistrates, juries of our own language, which were our equals. Having our faces towards these Countries, made the motion to our Governor that we might enjoy the same here, which thing was soon granted by him before he or they were ever come to these parts."

Roberts of Pencoyd also signed a similar petition in 1690, but the very next year Penn granted to his creditors some of the unsold land in the Welsh Tract, and that was the end of pretensions to autonomy. These were the years when "the Glorious Revolution" of 1688 which sent King James II into exile and brought William and Mary to the throne had their repercussions in America. Penn, who had remained too much the



exiled King's friend, was accused of treason and for two years, 1692-94, Pennsylvania was a royal colony. Their hopes of autonomy gone, the Welsh took office outside their Tract and slowly became an integral part of the general community.

In 1704, Roberts of Pencoyd was elected to the Assembly from Philadelphia County, into which Merion was incorporated when the "Barony" idea fell through. He served again from 1706 to 1709, in 1711, from 1713 to 1715 and in 1717. Since his first election came in the year the popular party swept the polls, it is safe to assume that Roberts was one of the Assemblymen who tried to win more of the fruits of "the Glorious Revolution" for Pennsylvania — judges appointed during good behavior and removable only by the Legislature, appropriation of certain perquisites of the Proprietor for governmental expenses and so on. Roberts was taking part in the early expressions by Americans of a determination to assert their rights as they saw them.

Life in the house of Pencoyd was not much affected by the shifts of politics. Good weather for crops and freedom of the seas for trade were more important. For the most part, the settlers enjoyed both. They also were free from one of the besetting fears of most frontier colonies. No Indian raids were known; relations with the aboriginal population were so good that no Pennsylvanian in these times needed loopholes or lookout posts, blockhouses or stockades for protection.

The farmers of the Welsh Tract were greatly concerned, though, about improving transportation. Near the head of a long list of those who in 1706 petitioned the Governor for a new road and ferry to serve the west bank of the Schuylkill was Roberts of Pencoyd. Two other John Robertses and a John Roberts Jr. signed also. The new facility was requested "for the Carriage of Corn, Mault, Meal, Lumber and other things by water to Philadelphia." The road was to go from Merion Meeting to Schuylkill Ford where Edward Robert, Hugh's son, was to provide a suitable boat.

Meeting was very much the center of local activities. Here the people met not only for the services whose simplicity caused others to look suspiciously upon them, but for the settlement of disputes, joint consideration of community or even family problems, weddings and exchange of views. It was at Merion Monthly Meeting, for example, that in John Roberts' time one man was forbidden to marry the woman of his choice because of "too near affinity." She was, it seems, his "deceased wife's mother's sister's daughter." On appeal, the quarterly meeting allowed the marriage. At Meeting too, were the first recorded American objections to slavery. As the servants brought over by the settlers worked out the terms of their indentures, they often were re-



placed by Negro slaves. There is no record that any were ever employed at Pencoyd, and Quaker principles condemned the institution almost as soon as it was introduced. German Friends were the first to protest against it in Yearly Meeting as early as 1688; by 1696 the Yearly Meeting officially discouraged it, and in 1715 owning slaves was made a "disownable" offense for a Quaker. No other group so large or influential had yet taken such a stand anywhere in America.

Weddings in Merion Meeting House were largely attended, and the feasting soon became so prodigious that the Elders admonished Friends against "extraordinary provisions" at such times. When John and Gaynor Roberts attended the marriage of Jonathan Jones, only son of Dr. Edward and Mary Wynne Jones, to Gainor Owen in 1706, the menu included ducks, hams, chickens, beef, tarts, creams, custards, jellies, floating island, beer, porter, punch and wine.

At Pencoyd reading seems to have been one of the chief diversions, as it was in many Quaker homes, for this was one of the few approved pastimes. Much of it, doubtless, was reading aloud, for John and Gaynor Roberts had two children to listen, Robert born February 16, 1685 and Elizabeth March 21, 1692. Two other children died in infancy, Richard, born December 18, 1687, and a first Elizabeth, born July 28, 1680. John's brother Richard came over from Wales sometime before 1698, and apparently his sister Ann, although it is not known if they lived near Pencoyd. Reading was not confined to religious books. Robert Barclay's "Apology for the True Christian Divinity," which has been called "the Alcoran of the Friends," recommended "to hear or read History." Books on biography and travel also were popular. Besides the Roberts' own books, they soon had access to those in a circulating library.

This collection for the Friends of the Welsh Tract was started about 1686 or 1697 by the joint Meetings of the three Tract townships, Merion, Radnor and Haverford, as appears from Minutes of Haverford Monthly Meeting which still survive. John Roberts was named to receive book subscriptions for Merion in 1696, and while it is not certain this is Roberts of Pencoyd, he was the most active of the John Robertses in those years. (This was thirty-five years before the Philadelphia library inspired by Benjamin Franklin who referred to his brainchild as "the mother of all North American subscription libraries" which it may have been, for the one in the Welsh Tract was free.) Typical of the books read at Merion were "Joseph Wyeth's Remarks on Dr. Braye," "Wm. Shewrn's Epistles" and "The Christianity of ye Quakers Assured."

Many of the sons of the Welsh Tract took part in what became a typically American drift from farm to city, but Robert Roberts preferred





*A portion of Holme's Map of the Province of Pennsylvania with names of the 1681 original purchasers of land from William Penn. Pencoyd was part of the tract marked Edward Jones & Company.*

to become what still was called a planter. He found his wife on a neighboring "plantation," too. She was Sidney Rees, five years younger than himself, the daughter of Rees and Elizabeth Evan from Ween, Penmaen, Wales. Her mother was the eldest daughter of John ap Thomas, who had been one of the negotiators with Penn for the Welsh Tract. Fifty-six neighbors and relatives signed the certificate when Robert and Sidney were married at Merion Meeting on June 17, 1709. The couple came to live at Pencoyd, although they soon had a house of their own on the farm nearer the river. Here they had four sons—John (1710-1776), Alban (1712-1727), Rees (1715-1755), Phineas (1722-1801)—and a daughter, Sidney (1729-1793). Another child, Elizabeth, lived only from September 21 to October 19, 1727.

Gaynor Roberts lived to see the first three grandsons, dying at 69 on February 10, 1721. Her husband sickened soon afterwards, being so ill within seven months that he executed his will. But he survived into his seventy-seventh year, dying on June 6, 1724. He was proud of what he had accomplished in his more than forty years at Pencoyd, for he had written in the story left "to my posterity":

"Soe leaving this account for our offspring & others yt desire to know from whence wee came & who wee descended from & when wee came to settle into this place where wee now abide; being then a wilderness land but now by gods blessing upon our endeavors is become a fruitful field. To gods name be the praise honour & glory who is worthy of it for ever & for ever more."

A close friend, Thomas Chalkley, who combined business and the ministry with rare success, had visited Pencoyd on June 5, and wrote of his host: "He was a helper of the poor and a maker of peace in the neighborhood"—a fine epitaph for any Friend.



of these actions of him & his friends of Lexington  
one in Ridgeville & another at Frankfort several miles  
west of it were the result of King George's course  
of taxation & administration Marquis de la Fayette  
to Richard Evans of 100 miles having a company about 13  
men & himself & over 8000 men under his command  
and a man of unusual man and in education and  
also a youth in every other respect at the mills from  
~~the first or second~~ <sup>the first</sup> or second  
old country side of Ridgeville & near  
Baldwin mission house he had collected meeting & all  
of those people with him & went up in the  
first week of November & marched in company with many  
of the ~~rest~~ <sup>other</sup> men from ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> same place & a body  
of about 10000 men & a day or two before  
they left the camp was broken up called green  
for a moment the camp was broken up & the word carried  
that the Colonists were off to fight & others as if thinking brought  
them to the camp to see what they were doing  
~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> camp was broken up & the word carried  
Dane took to his horse & rode home from his  
wife's Pala in mission & wife into Merton Edmo  
Garrison. Williamson <sup>born</sup> of a first birth male  
Convinced of truth in that mission  
it being said to him as one of being & always disposed  
to Quire soon would be same. That is the reason  
& why we have to give into the world now  
as it is my poor intellige, and that none of you will bring  
you to the camp now ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> you will bring it  
you unto us for our mess

the account of  
John Roberts life  
to my posterity



## Text of John Roberts' "Own Account"

"A short account of John Roberts, formerly of Llyn, being son of Richard Roberts, and grandson of Robert Thomas Morris, who lived at Cowyn, in the Parish of Llanerangan, and County of Caernarvon; my Mother being Margert Evans, daughter of Richard Evans of the Parish of Llangian and county aforesaid. Being convinced of God's Everlasting Truth about the year 1677, not by man nor through man, but by the Revelation of Jesus Christ in my own heart, being about thirty miles from any Friends or Meeting, in that time when I was convinced, but coming into acquaintance with Friends near Dollgella and near Bala in Merionethshire. I frequented their meetings while I abode in those parts. but by the Providence of God, in the year 1683 I transported myself with many of my friends for Pennsylvania where I and they arrived, the sixteenth day of the ninth month, One thousand six hundred and eighty-three, being then thirty-five years old; and settled myself in the place which afterwards I called Pencoid in the Township of Merion, which was afterwards called so by them, being the first settlers of it, having brought with me one servant man from my native land, and fixed my settling here I took to wife Gaynor Roberts, daughter of Robert Pugh from Llwyndedwydd near Bala in Merionethshire, her mother being Elizabeth William Owen, one of the first that was convinced of the Truth in that neighborhood. So leaving this account for our Offspring and others that desire to know from whence we came and who we descended from and when we came to settle unto this place where we are now abide, being then a wilderness, but now by God's blessing upon our endeavors is become a fruitful field. To God's name be the Praise, Honor and Glory, who is worthy of it for ever and for ever more."



# Chapter II

## Robert Roberts, Second Proprietor (1685-1768)

Nearly forty when his father died, Robert Roberts had been exercising more and more authority at Pencoyd for several years. The last of them had been especially difficult because from 1721 to 1723 Pennsylvania was in the throes of a severe economic depression. It was hardly worthwhile to take crops to market; cash was scarce and there was little to buy anyway because merchants did not dare import goods.

The distress of farmers in the Welsh Tract and laborers in Philadelphia, where 200 houses stood empty as whole families returned to the land or ventured deeper into the forest, stemmed from a transatlantic mania known to history as the South Sea Bubble. A South Sea Company assumed the British national debt in return for a monopoly of South Seas trade, among other privileges, and in a frenzy of speculation and peculation its shares went to 1000 on earnings which warranted perhaps a tenth of that. When loans based on the inflated prices were called in 1720, the bubble burst. So many banks and business firms failed that the effects spread all over the world.

The Roberts family suffered less than city folk. Pencoyd being self-sufficient for most necessities. But they shared in returning prosperity, heralded in 1723 by the first issue of Pennsylvania paper money, the only colonial currency which never depreciated very much. It was in this atmosphere that Robert came into his inheritance.

This, under his father's will, included all the land at Pencoyd and at Goshen, too, "with the edifices and buildings" thereon. Robert had received as a gift some time before the easternmost 48 acres of Pencoyd on the river; now the entire plantation was his. The will also bequeathed to him the 750 acres of Goshen land which, his father noted, "I sold to Owen Roberts at six pounds per hundred, some years since, but am not paid for it." (There is no surviving record that the land ever was paid for, but neither was it returned and more than 200 years later one of John Roberts' descendants jestingly reminded one of Owen's that the land probably belonged still to the heirs of Pencoyd.) With "my only son and heir apparent" thus provided for, John Roberts left £200 in



cash and "one moiety" or half of his "household stuff" and personal estate to his daughter, Elizabeth—she never married. His other bequests were: To each of his four grandsons, £5; to his brother, his brother's daughter Margaret, his sister's daughter, also Margaret, 40 shillings each; to Friends Monthly Meeting for the use of the poor, £5. He named his son and daughter as executors.

Robert already had earned a place for himself in the community; throughout his life he was being called upon more than most to witness deeds and wills for his neighbors and to serve as executor of their estates. He also had been operating from his river property a ferry which was a link in the main market route to Philadelphia. This was perhaps the one for which his cousin, Edward Robert, had provided a boat. The earliest record of it under his management, however, is in 1723 when the inhabitants of Germantown petitioned for a road to run from their market place to Robert Roberts' ferry. Robert was named "road viewer" with Hugh Evans, Andrew Robeson, Peter Shoemaker and others. The route was outlined on March 2, 1723, from Germantown to Andrew Robeson's mill opposite Pencoyd; from the mill a road ran into Philadelphia. After objections were overruled, this was confirmed on June 1, 1724.

The changing nature of the crops raised at Pencoyd reflects the demands of the market in Philadelphia. During Robert Roberts' time the city rose to unquestioned commercial pre-eminence among colonial cities, and in fact was second only to London in the British Empire. Merchants—for a long time they were Quaker merchants—dominated society; lawyers were less prominent than anywhere else because disputes were settled mostly in Meeting rather than in courts. (Until 1722 it was illegal to practice law for money in Pennsylvania.) As the city grew and the demands of trade altered, Pencoyd abandoned barley as its chief crop. Beef, suckling pigs, gammon and other pork products, vegetables and fruit, butter and eggs were raised at Pencoyd, and doubtless Robert had his own stall in the Philadelphia market; most farmers did who were as close to the city as he. Business opened at dawn on market days, announced by the bells of Christ Church the night before. Robert also raised substantial quantities of wheat and had it ground into flour for sale to city merchants, who used it as a staple in their West Indies and European trade.

The first indication of how the Goshen land was used is contained in a lease from Robert Roberts to Thomas Morgan, May 1, 1727, for 35 acres there. Morgan agreed to plant an orchard of 100 apple trees at ten-yard intervals within four years and to clear and stone the land well. He was to have all profit from the land for eight years in return, but



could not sow any part of it successively more often than once in two years except for eight acres adjoining his house. He could clear as much meadow as he saw fit, providing he fenced it. This lease concerned the smaller or 250-acre tract of John Roberts' Goshen property.

Robert did not devote himself entirely to farming. Besides his services to neighbors, he was active in various projects for the improvement of communications and in Meeting. In 1733, for example, he was elected with Samuel Humphreys, David George and John Warner as commissioners to extend the King's Highway to the ferry on the Schuylkill at High Street. This became the first long turnpike in the United States. the Philadelphia and Lancaster, which Roberts' eldest son, John, is thought to have helped survey.

The master of Pencoyd had been a trustee of Merion Meeting since before 1714, for in 1747 he is described in the deed to the Meeting property as the only survivor of the Trustees of 1714, the year in which the Meeting House was completed. These Welsh Quakers were not the soberly dressed people generally pictured, judging by the quantity of fine clothing and accessories they ordered from their favorite Philadelphia merchant, Thomas Coates. Silk gowns, gloves and hose for the ladies, embroidered waistcoats and brightly colored coats of fine stuff for the gentlemen were commonplaces. Coates also sold quantities of beaver hats and silver buttons to residents of the Tract.

In the same year that work was begun on the turnpike, 1733, the eldest son at Pencoyd, John Roberts 2d., was married. The date was May 4. John, who had excelled in mathematics and surveying at school, was already running boundary lines for neighbors and helping to lay out new roads. To this work he soon added that of builder. His bride was Rebecca, daughter of the Jonathan and Gainor Owen Jones of Wynnewood, whose wedding feast the Robertses had attended in 1706. Rebecca was eight months younger than her husband. The young couple set up housekeeping on the Pencoyd property, probably in the house where Robert had raised his family.

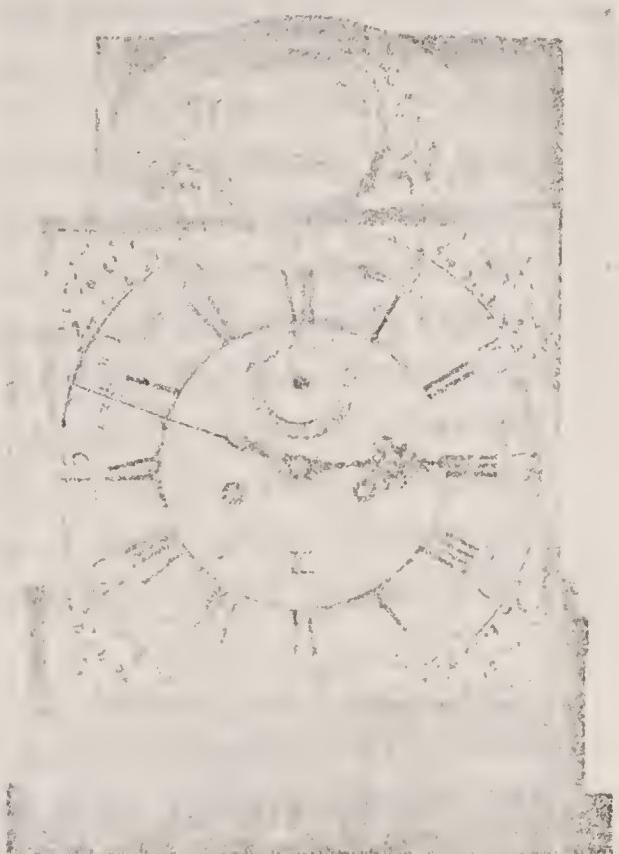
In the main house at Pencoyd there now lived Robert and his wife, his sister Elizabeth, who died in 1746, and the unmarried children. Alban, the second son, had died at fifteen. Rees, who never married, lived with his parents until his death in 1755. Phineas, the fourth son, married Ann Wynne in 1743 and went to live in Blockley Township. The youngest Roberts child, Sidney, married John Paul. The family at Pencoyd seems to have had closer relations with the city than the founder, as was natural with improved roads and the presence of more friends and relations in Philadelphia. Several of the latter had moved in from the Welsh Tract to take advantage of commercial opportunities



in town. Robert Roberts' cousin Edward, that son of Hugh who had been authorized to provide the ferry boat, was one of the first and most successful. He served as Justice of the Common Pleas, alderman and mayor. In 1729 his daughter, Jane, had married William Fishbourne, also a mayor of that city and member of the Governor's Council. Another daughter, Susannah, was married to Dr. Thomas Bond, a leading physician.

Philadelphia was small enough —still under 10,000 in 1744, that it was easy to know nearly everyone. Robert's son John was an acquaintance at least of Benjamin Franklin, who set up his own printing business in 1728, founded a newspaper the same year — the very first in the city, Andrew Bradford's *American Weekly Mercury*, had existed only since 1719 — and was one of the younger men of note within a couple of years. When Franklin and the club he founded, the Junto, organized the Philadelphia Library Company in 1731, John Roberts 2d. of Pencoyd was one of the fifty original subscribers who paid £2 apiece and undertook to contribute 10 shillings a year thereafter. When books ordered from England arrived, £45 worth, in October, 1732, the Robertses borrowed them from the library, located at the Junto's headquarters in Pewter Platter Alley. There was a considerable membership in Merion; young Roberts had paid his money and signed the articles of association at the home of Owen Owens, a neighbor. His share of stock, incidentally, was Number Nineteen. (This share remained in the family until 1832. At least three of the purchaser's descendants, his son Algernon, grandson Algernon S. and a later Gainor Roberts, acquired stock in 1801, 1828 and 1848 respectively.)

As Robert Roberts entered his sixties, he could look back on a record of steady improvements at Pencoyd which would have seemed spectacular in another country and age, for the farm took on the look of an estate which had been prosperous for generations. Since this was true of similar farms throughout the province, and indeed all the provinces, it did not occasion much remark. However, there were more



The clock made by David Rittenhouse for Robert Roberts, second proprietor of Pencoyd, now in the hall of the original house.



fields than woods at Pencoyd; stately trees still flourished but resembled more the parks of English gentlemen than the wilderness John Roberts found in 1683.

There were also more people and more buildings. Barns and out-houses of which we have no exact description had been built, also no doubt houses for servants and farm hands. John 2d. must have expanded his quarters, for he and Rebecca presented Robert with twelve grandchildren, all but one of whom lived through the then dangerous years of childhood. (They were Jonathan, 1734-99; Gainor, 1736-61; Alban, 1738-72; Elizabeth, 1740-82; Mary, 1742-71; Tacy, 1744-91; Benjamin, 1746--apparently the one who died early; John, 1747-1803; Robert, 1749-93; Algernon, 1751-1815; Franklin, 1752-74, and Edward, 1755-1825.)

The eldest, Jonathan, preferred medicine to farming and since there was no great feeling for primogeniture among the Quakers, his choice was indulged. Perhaps it even was suggested by his grandfather and father; on September 5, 1751, when Jonathan was 17 years old, his uncle Ezekiel Jones, son of a famous physician, wrote to John Roberts 2d. saying the boy had informed him "of being with Doctor Bond in Order to Learn to practice physick and Surgery. I am Very well pleased to find thee hath made so prudent a Choice for thy Son."

Uncle Ezekiel added that he had taken the opportunity to give Jonathan a little advice, "but I forgot to Admonish him against pride & Strong Drink to Excess for Either of them will Ruin him both body and Soul."

Jonathan was following in the footsteps of a distinguished line of Welsh Quaker physicians, who for many years dominated practice in Philadelphia. The three most eminent doctors of the province's early days were Quakers, Dr. Edward Jones, Dr. Thomas Wynne and Dr. Griffith Owen. Quakers, in fact, were particularly drawn to medicine partly because the English universities, which prepared boys for other professions, were closed to them. They could study under an older physician or attend at hospitals with no such restrictions, and since medical schools were far in the future, their training was as good as could be obtained. Many of them, including Jonathan's mentor, had studied on the Continent of Europe as well as Edinburgh or London.

Thomas Bond, although not Welsh, was a Quaker who had come with his brother, Dr. Phineas Bond, from Maryland. Both speedily won high place among the province's medicos. They were not quite as faithful Children of Light as their certificate from the Maryland Meeting indicated. Dr. Thomas had been in trouble for "disorderly conduct" in 1742, which meant he had taken an oath. Dr. Phineas actually had been dis-



owned by Philadelphia Meeting in 1748 because he failed to attend and also because he joined in military preparations. But no doubts were entertained as to their professional standing, and young Jonathan was lucky to be accepted by one of them as an apprentice. Probably the terms of his indenture were the usual ones of the day. He undertook not to fornicate, contract marriage, play at dice or cards, frequent ale houses, taverns or playhouses. The doctor, in turn, agreed to instruct the youth in the "trade or mystery" of physician, surgeon and apothecary, and supply his board and lodging and such washing as was fit for an apprentice.

In a packet of letters preserved at Pencoyd, the training and later professional life of an Eighteenth Century medico are detailed with remarkable clarity and interest. Jonathan was a good correspondent; he wrote letters home even when he was in Philadelphia.

He was in Dr. Bond's household for the final stages of a project that had long preoccupied the physician, establishment of a hospital for both the sick and insane, a complete novelty in America. By this time, Benjamin Franklin was such a power in the community—clerk of the Assembly, organizer of clubs and fire companies and libraries, founder in 1743 of the American Philosophical Society, of which Jonathan's mentor was the original physician-member—that people kept asking Dr. Bond if he had consulted the printer. So finally he did, and in August, 1751, Franklin published supporting articles in his *Gazette*. He also pushed a bill through the Assembly for an appropriation of £2,000 (an enormous sum then) providing an equal amount could be raised by private subscription.

The first hospital in what was to be the United States opened in a leased building, the mansion of the late Chief Justice John Kinsey near Seventh Street on High, now Market. (The structure built by the organization's own funds in 1755-56 on Eighth Street between Pine and Spruce is still used by the hospital.) Both Thomas and Phineas and Dr. Lloyd Zachary offered their services gratis and made up the first medical staff; Philadelphians contributed handsomely, including some of the wealthy women such as Sarah Fishbourne and Martha Robert, Edward's widow.

The hospital was almost entirely a Quaker enterprise except for the important part played by Franklin. Quakers were especially eager to demonstrate their public spirit just then because they were engaged in a serious dispute with their fellow citizens (and even within their own community) over a matter of conscience translated into practical politics. In England's most recent war with Spain, the War of Jenkins' Ear, enemy warships had plundered Pennsylvania vessels at the very mouth



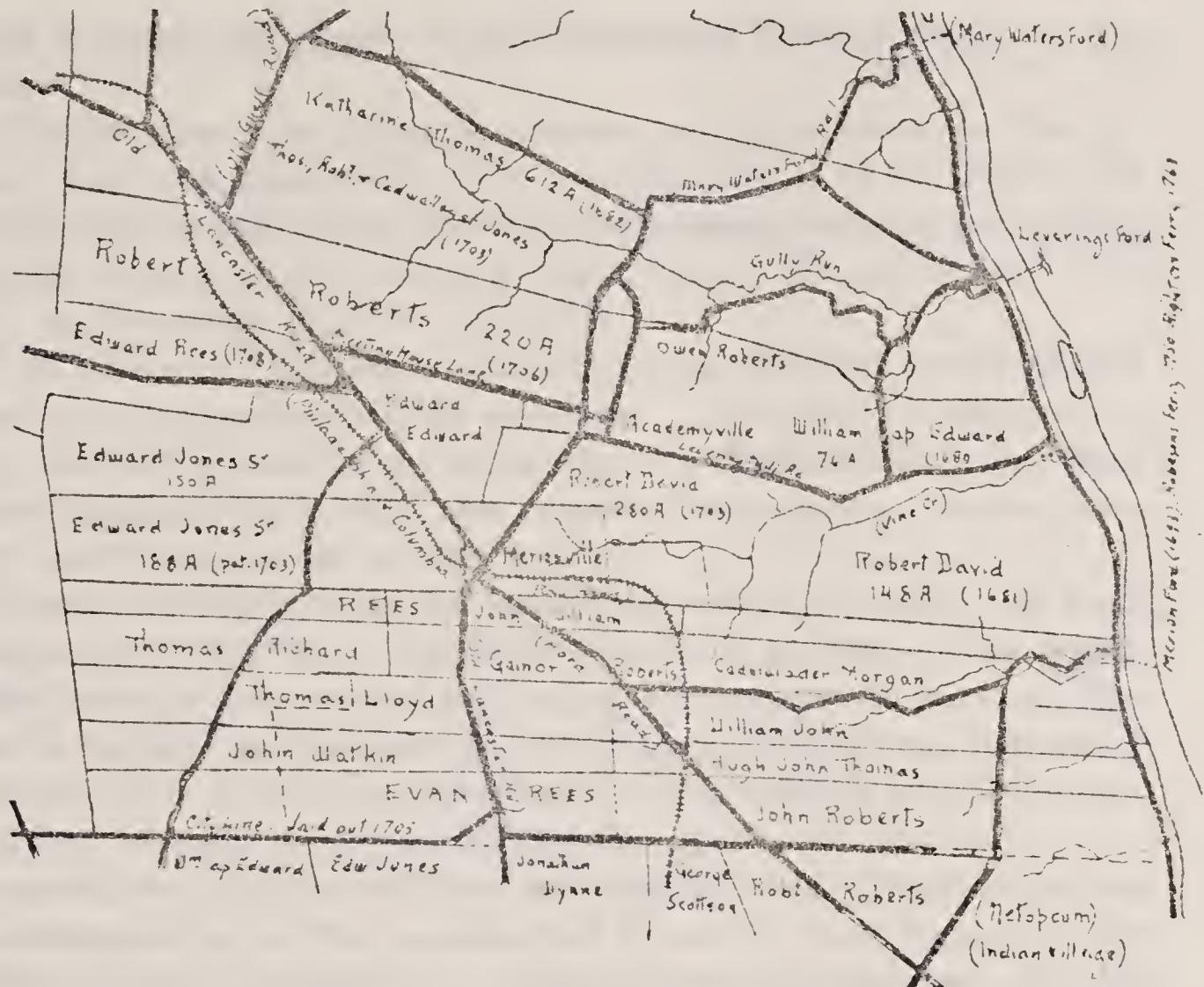
of the Delaware and since then Indian wars had spread for the first time into the province. Yet the Quakers who dominated the provincial government could not bring themselves to vote war supplies or war measures. They had long ceased to be a majority of the population, even in Philadelphia where in 1750 they were reckoned at one-quarter. Non-pacifist elements were highly critical, including the recently arrived Irish, who were numerous enough as early as 1730 to have a Monthly Meeting complain of the disturbances they made "under Pretence of Keeping a day to their Saint called Saint Patrick." The hospital was one way of proving that the Quakers cared about the welfare of their fellows even if they were not willing to support military defense. (It did not save their control of the province. By 1756 the pressure was so strong that Quakers by their own decision refrained from seeking or accepting office in the legislature or administration where they might have anything to do with war, and Penn's "Holy Experiment" in government which had endured for nearly three-quarters of a century was over.

The Robertses were especially concerned in the success of the hospital because it marked the first step in the professional advancement of young Jonathan. In the first months, the doctors supplied free whatever medicines were needed. But as donations came in, they sent to London for a supply of drugs, which arrived in December, 1752. The stock was big enough to require a special little shop and an apothecary to tend it. Dr. Bond recommended his apprentice, Jonathan Roberts, "as a good man." The youth gave bond for faithful performance of his duties and was duly elected on December 7, 1752, at an annual salary of £15. His shop was in the east back room of the hospital, and here he was in attendance daily to make up prescriptions ordered by the staff and medical consultants. Here the Robertses from Pencoyd visited him on their trips to Philadelphia, bringing baskets of herbs or other produce for the hospital commissary, a common and welcome method of contribution.

Service in the hospital with Dr. Bond was also a forward step in Jonathan's medical education, as both he and his master appreciated. Their success was considered phenomenal, Franklin writing that in the first two years the hospital cured sixty patients, more than half of those admitted. "So much good has been done by so small a number of contributors," he added.

Jonathan was helping Dr. Bond to fasten leg-irons and chains in which patients were confined during amputations, operations for the stone, incisions of breasts, tapping of chests and abdomens, etc. He observed treatment of measles, smallpox and typhus and in general learned





*Extract from an old map, unsigned and undated, of the Bala-Cynwyd District, showing the early subdivisions of the Edward Jones & Company land. As in many old maps, additions have been made to the original. These explain the presence of Robert Roberts's name, of the Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad, etc. Items bracketed are additions made by Douglas Macfarlan, 1960.*

about symptoms as well as therapy. After three and a half years he completed his apprenticeship; he resigned as apothecary of the hospital on March 19, 1755,\* to go to Nottingham in Chester County at Dr. Bond's suggestion to begin his practice. Competition in Philadelphia was too keen, the older man thought, for the city was the best supplied of any in America with medical talent, one John Reynall writing that same year "we have such great Plenty of 'em, that I wonder how they do live." Jonathan's letters home told of gaining a practice as well as treading carefully the lines marked out for conduct by the local Quakers who were "mighty rigid." He read his certificate from Philadelphia Meeting and could not help smiling "as I know not whether it is good or bad." There is a hint of the splendor of customary Welsh Quaker wardrobes at that time in another letter in which he says he has man-

\*From this point all dates are "New Style" — the calendar we use today.



aged to escape the censure of the Nottingham Meeting except for his clothes.

After two years he moved for professional advancement to Kent Island, Maryland, apparently at the recommendation of Dr. Bond, and within a few months he was deciding against any speedy return to Philadelphia because "I may change a single state of life, pretty soon." He did; on November 12, 1757, he wrote:

"As I have now a family of sixteen persons, including myself to take care of, I am spending few idle moments . . . Our family consists of my wife and self, a friend of my wifes, who is a childless widow, my wifes three daughters, three white men servants, five negroes, a woman servant, and a little orphan servant boy."

Jonathan Roberts never did come back, except on visits, and lived out the rest of his life in Maryland. Meanwhile at Pencoyd, his grandfather seems to have retired from active management of the firm. This fact is revealed as the result of a tragedy, a thunderstorm between 9 and 10 o'clock at night on September 3, 1760. Lighting struck the barn and hay barracks and John Roberts 2d. wrote, "all that had a . . . farmers store for man and beast were laid in ashes." The Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses by Loss from Fire, the oldest American corporation in continuous existence, had been founded only eight years before, and did not consider underwriting buildings in the country. But Quakers had their own informal way of compensating for such extraordinary losses. It was the custom to pass a subscription paper around the neighborhood, and even in severe emergencies to Friends in distant places. However, the resources of Merion were sufficient to rebuild the Roberts barn. The original subscription paper at Pencoyd shows that neighbors contributed from £5 to 5 shillings. At the head of the list is John Roberts, the miller, who was a kinsman of Rebecca Roberts through the Owens family. (This John Roberts died on the gallows in Philadelphia during the Revolution as a Tory.) Other subscribers were Richard George, Jacob and Benjamin Engle, Jonathan Roberts, Niclaus Rittenhaus, Christian Lehman and Nicholas Wahn.

Although Robert Roberts owned Pencoyd still, the barn was listed as the property of his son, John, who evidently was in full charge of the place. Robert, after all, was seventy-five years old. While he obviously had no intention of relinquishing complete control over his farm, he must have turned over the active management to his eldest son.



# Chapter III

## John Roberts 2d, Third Proprietor (1710-1776)

This John Roberts was the first master of Pencoyd to concern himself extensively with any other business than farming. As a surveyor—his contemporaries spoke of him as a very well educated man—he was in great demand for his accuracy and knowledge. He also became a prosperous builder: he is styled "carpenter" almost as often as "surveyor"; in those days a carpenter often was a man who designed and built houses. These activities made him sufficiently prominent in the community that in 1757 he had become a justice of the peace, a post of considerable honor and influence.

In 1761 he was also instrumental in bringing a new library to Merion. The one founded by his grandfather apparently had gone out of existence. He and his children had the benefit of the Philadelphia Library, of course, and on visits to the city on Saturday afternoons might see the wonderful curiosities collected there—stuffed snakes and birds, Indian artifacts, an air-pump presented by John Penn. They could look at the heavens through a telescope and at dead flies under a microscope, or even read—although if a reader fell asleep twice he was asked to leave. But books nearer home were important, too, and especially for neighbors who seldom got to the city. So a dozen members of the Merion Meeting, including the manager of Pencoyd, became directors of a circulating library under a partnership agreement signed December 1, 1761, and ordered about 100 books from England.

They were chiefly on travel, poetry, history, philosophy, science and biography. There were dictionaries and books on animal husbandry too. Mahomet, Marlborough and Swedish kings were among the subjects of the biographies. The collection included Voltaire's *Letters on the English Nation*, books on travel in Spain and the East Indies. Plutarch's *Lives*, works by Pope and Swift, the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, Locke on *Human Understanding*, "Cattos Letters," Court Intrigue and Franklin on Electricity. The Merion Library was less topheavy with the heavy, leaned theological works of the time than most big city libraries.

At this time there was a rebirth of Quaker spirituality and simplicity. The Friends withdrew from participation in government because, as an



English member of their community observed, holding office "hath been of great disservice to the real end of our being raised up as a peculiar people to bear our testimony to Him whose kingdom is in peace and righteousness." They reverted to a more literal interpretation of George Fox's precepts, but these never had meant a renunciation of the world, and the Roberts children were fairly good examples of the community.

Robert, the third son, for example, grew up to be an extremely gay blade for a Quaker of the pre-Revolutionary generation. He joined that oldest of all Pennsylvania clubs, the Schuylkill Fishing Company of the State in Schuylkill,\* where members drank the potent fish house punch and feasted on planked shad and beefsteak. But their diversions were quite mild; a favorite was watching John Mifflin's windmill pumping water for his garden and meadow. They also did a lot of hunting and fishing. Such dissipations, frowned upon in stricter circles, were hardly a preparation for the realities of life outside Pennsylvania. When Jonathan Roberts moved to Maryland, he was shocked by the laxness of non-Quakers and wrote:

"They bring up their children in this part of the world in a shameful state of ignorance and idleness: Indeed, to give them their due, they are taught to dance, and play at cards &c very notably. They are taught to dress and ride horse-races too, but these are their chief accomplishments. As for the improvement of the mind, you may as well look for it in Greenland."

Jonathan was liberal with advice to his next younger brother, Alban, who worked for their Jones uncles in Philadelphia. The lad was urged to industry, frugality, the reading of good books and deference to his uncles "as far as it is consistent with manly freedom, and without cringing or meanness." Alban, who seems to have had high hopes of inheriting the business, unfortunately died in 1772 before he reached that goal.

He survived his grandparents by only a few years. On April 30, 1764, in her seventy-fifth year, Sidney Roberts was thrown while riding horseback and fatally injured. She died on June 29, and was buried in Merion Graveyard. Her husband, Robert, "weak and infirm in body," executed his will less than a month later. Describing himself as "of sound mind and memory, considering my weakness," he left Pencoyd to his son John 2d. To his other surviving son, Phineas, he bequeathed 30 acres next to his own Blockley land, "the remaining part of the land my father bought from Andrew Wheeler." To his daughter, Sidney Paul,

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\*Originally "Colony" instead of "State." In some accounts another Robert Roberts is confused with our man, but the weight of the evidence points to the one from Pencoyd.



he left £50. The remainder of his estate was divided equally among the two sons and the son-in-law, these three being also executors.

The description Robert Roberts left of Pencoyd shows how the stone house was the center of an estate and community which were constantly changing. At this time the farm was figured at 180 acres. The boundaries were delineated by the lines of neighboring properties and such items as a "Hickory tree in the line of my mother's original purchase." But, in what already was an American tradition, the neighbors never remained the same from one description to another. A sketch purporting to show this part of the Welsh Tract in Robert Roberts' youth indicates that the neighbors were named Morgan, Jones and Morgan. By the time Robert wrote his will he named them as Evans, Griffith, Rudolph Latch (who bought his from Robert Roberts) and Garrett. Twelve years later they are Norris, Leacock, Bealerts and Stadlemian. It was not so much that Pencoyd expanded and shrank over new areas but that the surrounding farms changed hands. The disappearance of landmarks—"a dogwood," "a chestnut," "a marked hickory tree," "a stone"—and of many old records makes it impossible to trace exactly the changes in Pencoyd Farm's boundaries on the terrain as it exists today.

Robert Roberts actually lived nearly another four years after he made his will, dying on March 17, 1768, at the age of 83. He was buried in the graveyard next to the Merion Meeting House.

He seems to have been the original owner of one of the most interesting heirlooms still at Pencoyd, a handsome brass grandfather's clock made by the self-educated astronomer and instrument-maker, David Rittenhouse, who became Franklin's successor at the Philosophical Society. This is almost certainly the clock which, according to the sale list, John Roberts 2d. bought from his father's estate for £4. It then had no case; John apparently housed it in its present case because in the inventory of his widow it is described as having one.

The apprenticeship papers of Samuel Williamson of that same year, dated October 29, 1768, which are preserved at Pencoyd, give a glimpse of labor and training practices of the period. The lad agreed to serve John Roberts for a term of sixteen years. In return he was to be taught reading, writing and the "most useful rules of Vulgar Arithmetick" if he was teachable by reasonable schooling. He was also to have his board, lodging, clothing and laundry, and at the expiration of his term "two compleat Suits of Apparrel one whereof to be new."

During the proprietorship of John Roberts 2d., Pencoyd faced a problem which was becoming of concern on many older farms in America. The wonderfully fertile land described by the first settlers had been



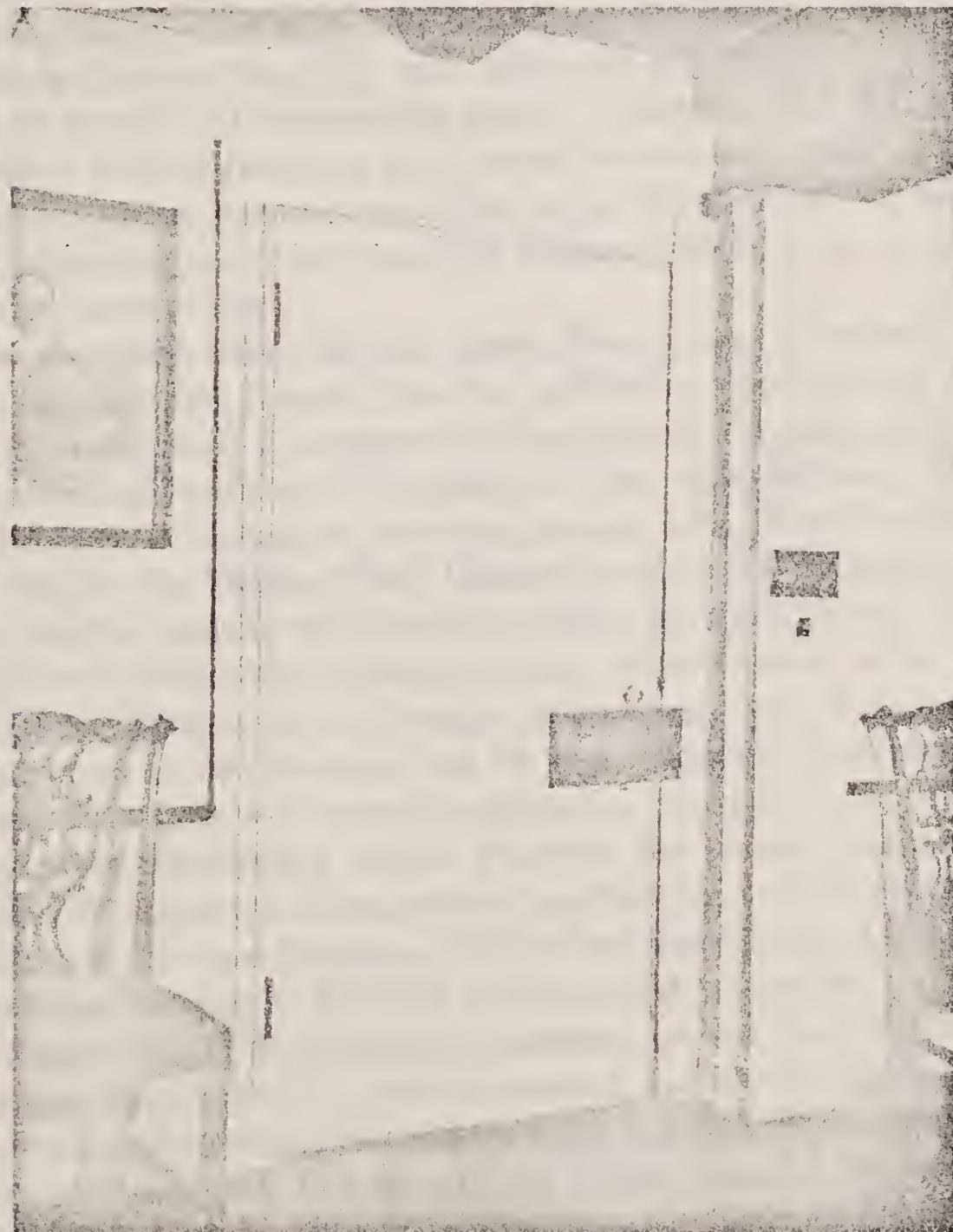
overworked in many regions, and the Welsh Tract was one. About a mile to the south, one pioneer in soil conservation and improvement had become a friend of the Roberts family. This was Richard Peters, nephew and namesake of the secretary to the proprietors of the Province. He had what was fast becoming a handsome property, Belmont—his mansion now is a feature of Fairmount Park. The young agriculturist is credited in histories of farming with introducing the use of gypsum, or "land plaster" as lime was called, to this region in 1770 when he was only 26 years old, the same age as John Roberts' seventh child. The master of Pencoyd was 60, but not too old to learn from his juniors. By 1773 he had his own kiln "for manuring land." On March 1 of that year he signed a 21-year lease for 47 perches (rods) of land on the Righter's Ferry Road in Merion. He already, with leave, "hath built a lime kiln" on it and he now agreed to pay the owner one-half bushel of good wheat annually as rent.

This early liming of Pencoyd's fields probably was partly due to the proprietor's sixth son, Algeron, born in 1751. He obviously was more keenly interested in the farm than his brothers for on September 1, 1775, when he was only 24 years old, he leased from his father the 150-acre main "plantation" with all its buildings and equipment. Unfortunately these are not described. The term of the lease was the lives of his parents. The document, which is now among the Pencoyd records, stipulated that he was to pay them £25 a year and they were to have "use and enjoyment of certain parts of the dwelling house, spring house, garden and orchard." He also was to furnish them "in a good and Genteel manner with all proper and convenient Sustenance and also such friends & Relations as they may please to Invite & Entertain Suitable to their dignity and Station. And also keep one or more good & quiet Horse or Horses for their use . . . & provide them fire wood suitable for the Hearth or stove as they may chuse." If he fell behind a month in the rent or defaulted on any other terms, the property could be repossessed.

At this time, however, neither soil conservation nor the transfer of authority at Pencoyd were the main preoccupation of the family. The controversy between the colonies and Crown of England had stirred the whole community so deeply that after actual fighting began on April 19, 1775, at a bridge in Concord, Massachusetts, even the Quakers of the Welsh Tract divided on the issue. Young men deserted the teachings of their faith to join the armed forces. Up to this time the Robertses seemed to have been relatively inactive in the quarrel although the new young master's first name is a hint of their politics; it was that of Algernon Sidney, the noble Whig leader of a century earlier, who died for



his principles in England. His namesake at Pencoyd and the next older brother, Robert were so roused by "the shot heard round the world" that they went into "training to learn the art of war" as a disapproving Quaker meeting put it. Robert also joined the First Troop of Philadelphia City Cavalry of which his fellow Fish House club member, Samuel Morris, was Captain.



*Main door of the original part of the house at Pencoyd,  
photographed in 1960. Portrait at left is of Rosalinda  
Roberts, wife of the fifth proprietor.*



# Chapter IV

## Algernon Roberts, Fourth Proprietor (1751-1815)

The forty-year regime of Algernon Roberts at Pencoyd ran for a bit more than four months under the lease from his father. John Roberts 2d. died on January 13, 1776, and under his will, dated the previous October 2, he left 100 acres of the farm to Algernon, "all that part of the Tract of land whereon we now live above the new road." The will also called upon the young man to live up to the terms of the lease so far as his mother was concerned and to pay various sums of cash to his brothers and sisters.

A few days after their father's death, Robert was "dismissed" from the Merion Meeting—January 26—for soldiering with the First Troop. Algernon, too, joined a company of "associators" or state militiamen with the rank of lieutenant. A register of Continental officers published in Washington in 1924 from surviving records lists "Algernon Roberts, Pa., Lt. Ph. Bn. Pa. Militia 1776." His action was noted promptly by the Merion Meeting, and in the minutes for May 10, 1776, is this entry:

"The case of Algernon Roberts coming under Consideration and it appearing he Persists in the Practice of Bearing arms. It is the sense and judgment of this Meeting that he hath Publickly Renounced our Peaceable Principles and cannot be deemed a Member of our Religious Society whilst Continuing in the Practice, but disown him untill he through Circumspect walking makes this Meeting such Satisfaction as the Nature of his case Requires. Which that through the Assistance of Divine Grace he may be Enabled to do is what we desire."

On August 16, 1776, Algernon's company set out from Philadelphia on the one "campaign" in which he served, and during which he kept a detailed journal still at Pencoyd—a copy is in the Sparks Manuscript Collection at Harvard. It was only six weeks since the Declaration of Independence, but revolutionary enthusiasm was tempered by news of General Washington's reverses in and around New York.

Algernon's company set out in a shallop, a then popular type of open boat, which had been used for freighting bran, on the first stage of a journey which they expected to take them to Paulus Hook, now Jersey



City. When they encountered their first delay, due to an ebbing tide, "being now hartily tired of our shallop which stank so of the bran," they left a guard on their baggage and marched as far as Bristol in Bucks County. In Bristol so many other "associators" were bound for the army that fares were exorbitant. When the shallop appeared, Algernon and his companions decided to bear with the smell as far as Trenton Landing, from where they marched to their destination. Algernon was impressed with "Prince Town" and thought its beautiful situation in fertile, well settled country "no doubt was the occasion of erecting that famous College . . . a beautiful stone edifice."

The marshes around Hackensack, by contrast, made him long for the hills of Pennsylvania. Then, curious about New York City, he obtained a pass—although it was occupied by the British, this was possible. He noted that "without a guide we could give but a poor description of the City more than to say it seemed to be devested of almost all that makes a City agreeable and the streets barrocaded in such a manner that it gave it a most dreary appearance." After wandering through "this forlorn city till evening" he and his companions found they could not get a boat and so were forced to spend the night.

At Elizabeth, New Jersey, the company was roused by a report that the British had landed nearby. The men "showd the greatest celerity in getting to arms and marching down to the point," but it was a false alarm. Shortly thereafter came orders to go home, "received with inexpressable joy." The company reached Philadelphia on September 17 after a month and a day "in which we underwent many toils that can be better imagined than expressed."

Serving with the Seventh Battalion of Pennsylvania Militia during 1777 and 1778, the lieutenant of 1776 rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Col. Isaac Warner, Algernon's future father-in-law, was the regimental commander.

With the promotions went still further defection from Quaker principles. In 1777 Algernon Roberts still "affirmed" his loyalty to his new country. In 1778 he took an oath of allegiance. But his patriotic work was less in fighting than in support of the army. In 1778 he was elected a member of the Assembly for Philadelphia County and in 1780 he was appointed a commissioner to buy supplies for the army. He must have known something of the difficulties of the task. During 1777 while the British occupied Philadelphia and Washington's army starved at Valley Forge, farmers within reach of either—and that included Merion Township—were subjected to raids by both, but the British usually paid in gold. On August 15, 1777, Algernon Roberts was one of those who complained to the Governor that a Colonel White's men of Georgia's Ameri-



can troops were overrunning their fields, taking fruit and other produce.

By the time Algernon Roberts was an army purchasing agent, inflation had given the Continental currency a reputation for worthlessness. He issued certificates—some are at Pencoyd—to pay \$200 for a sheep and \$3,600 for a bull.

His brother, Robert, had joined his troop in March, 1777, after it returned from a tour of duty with Washington's tattered army in "the Jerseys," where the battles of Princeton and Trenton had bolstered wan ning morale. The First Troop escorted the Commander-in-Chief when he paraded his ragged men through the city streets, green sprigs in their hats offering the only semblance of uniform. Then and during the Army's stay at Valley Forge, members of the Troop conveyed money, guarded important prisoners of war and carried messages. It is probable that Robert was the Mr. Roberts Washington mentions in a famous letter to Congress as having just brought him word that the British had evacuated Philadelphia that morning, June 18, 1778. Robert saw action with his troop when it took the field in September, 1779, again in June, 1780, and during 1781. His name was placed on the "honorary" roll September 10, 1787.

Until a few years ago a powder horn and pair of elaborately decorated horse pistols which Robert carried during the war were among the heirlooms at Pencoyd. Then the pistols mysteriously disappeared; the powder horn remains. The pistols were ornamented with finely etched brass work; the powder horn carries a representation of Independence Hall.

During the last years of the war, Algernon Roberts was courting his Colonel's daughter; in fact, he seems to have been her suitor as early as 1777. Tacy Warner was then the same age, 16, as Algernon's attractive cousin, Sally Wister of Gwynedd, who was beginning a journal much admired in later generations for its vivacious accounts of the times and their manners. Tacy brought its first English blood into the Roberts family when she was married to Algernon on January 18, 1781, by the Rev. M. Hultgren, at the Old Swedes Church in Philadelphia. Five sons and six daughters were born to them between 1782 and 1805.

By the time of his marriage, Algernon was known as one of the best farmers in the district. He also had expanded the holdings left him by his father more than two-fold, his farm now lying on both sides of City Line, partly in Blockley and partly in Merion Townships. He had bought from brothers, cousins and neighbors, so that a tax list of 1780 records his ownership of 224 acres.

Despite the early use of lime, he was dissatisfied with the condition



of the land he had inherited. Years later he wrote that it had become depleted and infested with weeds. He introduced a system of crop rotation, increased the applications of lime or "plaster" and converted his acres largely to livestock production, first beef cattle and then a dairy herd. He carried on a relentless warfare against weeds; twenty years of it paid off so that he was able to announce to his fellow agriculturists at last that not a "Dock, Daisy, Mullein or Saint John's wort" remained in any of his fields.

Algernon Roberts was a preacher as well as a practitioner of the agricultural reforms in which during the years just after the War of Independence Pennsylvanians generally pioneered. Of course, "dirt farmers" scoffed at the intellectuals and said they "talk politics and publish nonsense." But the reformers saved American agriculture. Algernon's friend, Richard Peters of Belmont, was a leader in the movement. He was one of several influential men who met at the Sign of the Cock Tavern on Front Street in Philadelphia in 1785 and formed the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture. Peters was its first President and contributed about 100 papers on fertilizers, strains of grasses, breeding of livestock and other topics. In 1787, while fifty-five gentlemen from the various states were meeting in Philadelphia to draft a new Constitution for a new nation—their chairman, George Washington, took time to attend at least one meeting of his friend's farm group—Peters and Algernon Roberts were leading figures in the organization of the Blockley and Merion Society for Promoting Agriculture and Rural Economy. The owner of Belmont was first President, the owner of Pencoyd first Treasurer—a post he held until his death 28 years later. The Society was one of Algernon's chief interests. From its small dues—7 shillings 6 pence a quarter—he built up a useful library for his fellow members. He read a number of papers at its meetings; it was in one of them that he announced the conquest of the weeds at Pencoyd.

He was one of the first and remained one of the most successful dairy farmers of the region. His decision to shift from meat to milk was a tribute to the size of Philadelphia, his main market; the first census of the new national government in 1790 showed the city had a population of 28,522. There was as yet no fluid milk industry; city folk got the liquid from their own cows, so Algernon Roberts' principal product was butter. The records of his dairy operations which survive at Pencoyd show that he kept twenty cows. In one of his reports to the Blockley and Merion Society he offered a balance sheet for his operations from 1799 to 1807 "to form a comparison between the profits of a grazing and a dairy farm, whenever any gentleman of the Society will have the goodness to exhibit *from experience*, a statement of the aver-



age gain, in a given number of years, upon Cattle fatted for Market."

The figures he submitted showed that from 1799 to 1807 Pencoyd's butter sales amounted to \$8,276, and the family consumed milk valued at \$1,506 from three cows. Twenty calves a year were sold at \$4 each, a total of \$640 for the eight years. Pork raised on dairy by-products brought \$816 and suckling pigs an additional \$320. The gross was \$11,558. Expenses, including 6 per cent interest on the value of the cows, amounted to \$7,748. The net profit of \$3,810 was very satisfactory, Algernon wrote, and more than could be derived from the same number of beef cattle although he conceded that management of a dairy was more laborious and confining.

Long before the start of the period he described, Algernon had made his peace with Merion Meeting. This is apparent from the fact that in 1791 when he put up a new barn he was in sufficiently good standing as a Friend to merit a severe reprimand, so the family story goes, for excessive ostentation in the building. It was indeed an imposing structure of the same fieldstone and flint which his great-grandfather had used for the house. Two stories high on one side and three on the other, it would have dwarfed the house if it had been a little closer for it was no less than 76 feet long and 37 wide. Actually, it would appear that the barn really was a good deal larger than necessary.

Shortly thereafter, during the years that the seat of government was in Philadelphia, Algernon Roberts probably saw something of President Washington, who was a frequent visitor at Belmont. The General and Richard Peters had been close friends ever since the younger man had served as secretary and chief worker of the Board of War during the Revolution. In 1792 Washington appointed him U. S. District Judge, a post he held for 36 years. Algernon often rode over to see his colleague in the Blockley and Merion Society, and Washington, who was as enthusiastic a farmer as either Pennsylvanian, would have been in his element in talk about grasses and beeves: he may well have ridden to Pencoyd a mile away.

To run his dairy, Algernon employed a couple, John and Mary Ease-wine, at a joint salary of \$300 a year plus quarters on the farm. One of Mary's duties was to churn the butter, and the "Butter Book" at Pencoyd shows that she printed 922 pounds between April 1812 and March 1813. She sold it for \$240.82, just over 26 cents a pound and an average of \$40.13 from each cow. No doubt this was sold mostly at the new sheds of the city market between Fifth and Sixth Streets on High Street where Algernon Roberts had stall number 116. (A receipt for the \$20 annual rent in advance at Pencoyd is made out in his name although dated after he died.) Attendance at the stall 39 market days a year was



I D O hereby CERTIFY, That  
I, Algernon Roberts, do solemnly declare,  
That I have willingly taken and subscribed the AFFIR-  
MATION of Allegiance and Fidelity, as directed by  
an Act of General Assembly of Pennsylvania, published the  
13th day of June, A.D. 1777. Witness my hand  
and seal, the 13th day of June, A.D.  
*Algernon Roberts*  
PRINTED BY JOHN DUNCAN.

*Algernon Roberts' affirmation of loyalty to the  
newly sovereign State of Pennsylvania in 1777,  
preserved at Pencoyd.*

part of the duties of the Easewines--they had to spend 25 cents each trip on turnpike and bridge tolls, but this is a sign of improved transportation. Philadelphians of that day ate well, for they had a higher percentage of prosperous folk than most cities. When a city directory was published in 1805 merchants were the largest single category, followed by laborers. In addition to the butter, the Easewines sold fowls, vegetables, fruit, eggs, veal's tongue, lard, dried beef, pickled pork and gammon from Pencoyd, considerably increasing the farm's income.

Like his grandfather, Robert, Algernon Roberts was in great demand as adviser and executor for his neighbors, of whom there were so many that the township was divided into Upper and Lower, with more than 1400 people in Lower Merion by 1800. The Blockley and Merion Society noted that no man in the County "had such an extensive guardianship" as Algernon because "the dying parent bequeathed to him alike the care of his fortune and his progeny."

Algernon himself died on December 21, 1815, and in an obituary published by the Society he had served as Treasurer for so long it was lamented that "none will be more regretted, and few so much missed." But the tribute which Algernon himself probably would have liked best was:

"If distinguished by his social virtues, it was as an agriculturist that he stood preeminently high. No farmer in the neighborhood could vie with him for method or cleanliness in the culture of his estate; an estate which he found exhausted and barren, but which he has left rich and productive."

In his will he distributed not only his fertile acres with their houses and farm buildings but a personal estate valued at \$50,000, a very considerable fortune for that day. The house at Pencoyd with the acreage Algernon had inherited or somewhat more went to his second son, Isaac



Warner Roberts, born in 1789. The eldest son, John (1787-1837), had already received another farm in Montgomery County which is not mentioned in the will. The youngest son, George Washington Roberts (1802-1857), was to have the rest of the farm adjoining the land willed to Isaac Warner. The two remaining boys, Algernon Sidney (1798-1865) and Edward (1800-1872), were learning the wholesale drug business in Philadelphia. They later established their own firm and became men of substance: Edward's son, Howard (1843-1900) was a sculptor of some note; the bicentennial of the Roberts family's arrival in America saw his statue of Robert Fulton erected in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington, and it gave him a national reputation. Another of his surviving works is a bas-relief in plaster of his uncle, Isaac Warner Roberts, now in the possession of the subject's grandson and namesake.

Algernon's widow received, among other bequests, his bank and bridge company stocks, and his newest riding chair. She and her daughters were to have the use of such rooms at Pencoyd as she deemed necessary, also a horse, cow and riding chair for her use and firewood cut short and delivered to her door. Isaac Warner Roberts was to pay \$10,000 to his brothers and sisters, was to serve as executor with his brother John, and the two with their mother were named guardians of Algernon's minor children.

Tacy Roberts did not remain at Pencoyd, however. She and her four unmarried daughters—Lydia, Gainor, Ann and Tacy—moved to Philadelphia, to live in the city until Mrs. Roberts' death on May 9, 1828. The eldest daughter, Rebecca, had died at 17 in 1799, and another, Elizabeth (1795-1837), had recently been married to Miles N. Carpenter.

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# Chapter V

## Isaac Warner Roberts, Fifth Proprietor (1789-1859)

Through the precept and example of his father and no doubt by inclination, Isaac Warner Roberts was a keen as well as a progressive farmer. Twenty-six years old when he assumed the reins at Pencoyd, he devoted the remaining 44 years of his life principally to the improvement of his land. From 1838, he was a member of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, and he was a consistent winner of prizes for cattle at local fairs.

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His was the era in which the United States expanded into a vast continental agricultural nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was the era that saw the foundations of what became the world's most extensive industrial and transportation network, the development of the great Louisiana Purchase and the acquisition of California, Texas and the Northwest. It witnessed enormous improvements in technology and communications which had profound repercussions at Pencoyd, for they enlarged both the farm's market and facilities for production. Philadelphia, which had a population of about 60,000 when Isaac Warner Roberts inherited Pencoyd, swelled to more than half a million (partly by natural increase, partly by consolidation with Philadelphia County) by the time he died. The city needed more and more of Pencoyd's dairy products and provided steadily improved land and water ways to get them—most roads still were farm-market roads.

The contract which Roberts signed on January 9, 1827, with Samuel Ott for the management of Pencoyd's dairy reflects the new era, for Ott was not, like the Easewines, a hired hand. He owned his own horse and bought its feed, provided utensils for the dairy and a dearborn (a popular type of light carriage) to transport himself and his produce to market. He had discretion to market his milk and butter to the best advantage; he had the care of eighteen cows in summer and ten in winter. In return he received one-third of the profits. He also had the use of a house and garden, as much milk and butter as he wanted for his family, feed for his own hog and the privilege of cutting six cords of firewood from the wood lot.

From this year, 1827, dates the first detailed, authentic description of



the house. It was made because the proprietor decided to take out insurance, the old Quaker custom of mutual aid being less reliable than in the past. He did not have a policy from the oldest institution in the field, the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire (to give it its full name, which hardly anyone does) although his family was to be closely identified with it. This pioneer firm, founded by Franklin among others in 1752, decided about twenty years later not to insure houses with trees close to them because the trees made it difficult to drag fire hoses up to the roof. (In those days insurance companies maintained their own fire brigades. Each one, though, fought only fires which broke out in houses its parent had insured.) The directors did not agree on this restriction, so a dissenting minority of the Board resigned to set up a rival firm, the Mutual Assurance, known as the "Green Tree" company from its emblem, which it adopted to show that it was not so fussy about the planting around a house.

This company's agent wrote out in a fine hand with flourishes in Policy No. 4613 a description of Pencoyd which on November 28, 1827, the owner certified as correct. The two-story and garret stone house was said to be six miles from the city and 40 by 28 feet in dimensions—apparently the agent used interior measurements. The first story was divided into three rooms, each with its own chimney breast and one with a plain mantle. The hall was entered by a "common square front door." The second story had four rooms and the garret three; all ten rooms were described as "plaister'd." There was an electric conductor (lightning rod). Two flights of plain open stairs with painted straight handrail and square newels led up from the entry to the second floor; the garret was reached by a trap door. The floors were of heart of white pine boards and the interior partitions were of boards under the plaster. All the windows had panes of 8 by 10 inch glass, the attic windows being dormers of four lights each.

The kitchen, which adjoined the house but was separate from the original 1684 building, was also of stone, 17 feet 6 inches by 25 feet 6 inches, one and a half stories high. The walls both upstairs and down were plastered, but not the ceilings. In the kitchen proper there was a plain mantle over the fireplace; the washboards, closets and windows were all cased. There was also a new separate stone washhouse, 15 feet 6 inches by 17 feet 6 inches, with a brick floor and shed roof. Three boilers were erected "secure" in the brickwork with an ash hole below. In front of the kitchen was a plain open shed on plain square posts with a shingled roof.

The description noted that there were no buildings near. The house



and its kitchen, etc., were covered for \$1,600 at an annual premium of \$48. Indicating the relative values of buildings, this was the exact amount for which the year before its owner had insured the huge barn, policy No. 4530, and agreed to pay an even higher premium, \$56 a year. The description noted that there were 20 stalls with earth floors, racks and mangers. The rest of the ground floor was taken up by "fodder gangs, fodder rooms, etc.," the floors of which were of rough oak planks. Upstairs was a threshing floor of oak boards two inches thick. The rest of the structure was devoted to hay mows. The barn was protected by two lightning rods. Adjoining it was a one-story stone hay house, 22 by 32 feet, with a shed roof, and ten feet away a two-story stone stable, 18 feet wide and 60 feet long. The lower floor of this last was divided into stalls; above was a hay loft. In June, 1829, there was added a new two-story stone stable 20 by 25 feet; the stalls on the lower floor here had floors of three-inch oak planks; upstairs was another hay loft.

By January 3, 1835, when the house policy was amended, a new two-story and attic stone kitchen had been built, 19 by 27 feet. The first story was all in one: the description is otherwise that of the original except that the floors were of heart of pine boards. Upstairs were two rooms with floors of narrow white pine boards; they were reached by "common winding stairs." The attic, reached through a trapdoor, also had the narrow white pine board floors. All the windows were like those in the house, with 8 by 10 inch glass panes. The whole was topped by a ridged roof.

There were fewer children at Pencoyd than in the two previous generations. On March 20, 1817, Isaac Warner Roberts married Emily Thomas, 22-year-old daughter of William and Naomi (Walker) Thomas, in a ceremony performed by Jacob Barker, a Philadelphia alderman, in the presence of the couple's families and friends. Four daughters were born to them—Rebecca, December 15, 1817-1899; Mary, 1819-1900, who married her cousin, Colonel Owen Jones of Wynnewood in the Welsh Tract; Gainor, 1821-1898; and Emily, born in 1823, who died the next year.

In 1825, the mother died, and two years later, on Washington's Birthday, 1827, the widower married Rosalinda Evans Brooke, daughter of George and Hannah (Evans) Brooke. The bride, born in 1800, was of a Welsh Quaker family, and the ceremony was that of the Friends, performed in the home of her parents at Radnor. This second marriage produced two sons, Algernon (1828-1868) and George Brooke (1833-1897).

By this time Isaac Warner Roberts' brother, Algernon Sidney, had



acquired land near Pencoyd and was building an estate he called Windermere. He and Edward Roberts already were prospering in the drug business, and Algernon Sidney seems to have acquired part, at least, of the farm left to their youngest brother. He was sufficiently established there when his Pencoyd nephews were boys that they sometimes lent a hand on his place besides working at chores on their own. However, they had plenty of time left over for games and sports and schooling—gunning for quail and wild ducks along the river, taking care of pet pigeons and dogs, and also attending Lower Merion Academy which had been founded by their kinsman, Jacob Jones. The school building is still part of the Lower Merion school system, site of the Bala-Cynwyd Junior High School. Later Algernon studied at a Friends school at Franklin Park—tuition, board and all incidentals for the fall and winter term came to \$95—and George, after attending Samuel Alsop's Friends school in Wilmington, Delaware, went on in 1848 to Rensselaer Institute in Troy, New York, from which his cousin Percival, Algernon S. Roberts' son from Windermere, had been graduated the year before.

The house at Pencoyd by this time had achieved the blessings of water "laid on" at least into the kitchen and wash house. It came in lead pipes, pumped by hand, and the proprietor sometimes worried about possible lead poisoning. So in 1848, we find his son Algernon noting in a diary he kept that year, and which survives at Pencoyd, that he had taken samples to an eminent chemist for tests. These showed the water quite pure. Algernon Roberts had gone to work for a Philadelphia hardware firm, Price, Newlin and Company, and lived in the city. There were now "the Westchester cars" to take him out to Pencoyd, but the fare was  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents, and he often walked the six miles especially on fine days.

That this was still the real "do-it-yourself" era of American life is indicated in many of his entries—he fixed the bathhouse pump; he discovered a new way of waterproofing his own shoes by dissolving bits of India rubber in turpentine, a process which took three weeks; he noted prospects for next summer's refreshing drinks because one January day the ice was a foot thick on the pond near Righter's Ferry.

In the same years, George's letters home and some of those sent to him by the family give a glimpse of schoolboy as well as farm life at mid-century. At 13, for example, George applied himself to a curriculum in Alsop's school consisting of reading, writing, philosophy, grammar, geography, definitions in the spelling book and ciphering according to the "Lewis Arithmetic." Later on he ventured into algebra and chemistry—he wanted to be an engineer—and was taken up a surveying trip.



At home the extent to which Quaker principles had been relaxed in the Roberts family (as in many others) was evident in the fact that family portraits were being done—Rebecca even persuaded Isaac Warner Roberts to sit for a daguerrotype. Perhaps he was influenced by the fact that the year before his brother-in-law, Owen Jones, had commissioned Thomas Sully to paint a portrait of the two small Jones children. Sully was one of the leading portrait painters of the day and Rosalinda Roberts thought it “a beautiful painting.” But pictures were not the only sign of the changing times. In the city, Algernon escorted two of his aunts to a lecture on Women’s Rights by Lucretia Mott without reproof. (Mrs. Mott was a leading Philadelphia Quaker by then and had just finished founding, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the country’s first women’s right convention.) That very same week, equally without any objection, the young man heard a very fine performance of “Lucia de Lammermoor” sung by M. and Mme. Laborde. He attended dancing classes, too, heard Thackery lecture and saw a Panorama of the Mississippi.

Meanwhile Pencoyd was being expanded still further. Between the summer of 1848 and spring of 1849, Isaac Warner Roberts completed a new stone wing jutting out to the east of the old house. The master bedroom, which had been on the first floor, was moved to the second story of the new addition, to the surprise of the daughters of the house who had not thought their father would consent to move upstairs with so little fuss. It was all finished by the time son George came home from Rensselaer Institute with his degree in civil engineering, which he obtained in March, 1849. He was not quite 16—the course for engineers was shorter and easier then although George had worked hard enough to complete the three-year curriculum in two—and saw the new addition for the first time. He could hardly recognize “mother’s room” with its new partition and the fireplace removed. He made a sketch of the house, the first graphic rendering of it in the 165 years of its existence. (The brick chimneys of his drawing gave way to stone when the young artist’s son remodeled the house about 1912.)

For the first time, there was no son of Pencoyd to look forward eagerly to a career in agriculture, although George did write on one occasion that he did not like to leave the farm; he sought a more lucrative line of work. In fact, both sons were strongly drawn in the direction of the two principal paths to American economic growth of their day, transportation and heavy industry. George, who after all had not studied engineering to become a farmer however much he loved the fields and woods of Pencoyd, was inclined toward railroading. Algernon and his cousin Percival, the heir to neighboring Windermere, saw a future in



iron. It was a sign of the times that these youths turned from the Roberts tradition of farming, commerce or the professions.

They had ample encouragement from the older generation as represented by Isaac Warner and Algernon Sidney Roberts. When Algernon and Percival founded the Pencoyd Iron Works at a river site on the original Roberts property, their capital of \$50,000 was contributed by their fathers. This was in 1852. When George, after a term of graduate work at Rensselaer on a teaching scholarship which paid all of \$50 a session, wrote home three days after his eighteenth birthday (which fell on January 15, 1851) that there were no railroad openings in New York, his Uncle Algernon stepped into the breach. Along with many of the more forward-looking merchants of Philadelphia, Algernon S. Roberts had backed the State charter for the Pennsylvania Railroad, finally granted in 1846, in order to compete with the Baltimore and Ohio for the trade of the West and maintain the competitive position of their city against Baltimore and New York. At that time the only route to Harrisburg was the "Main Line of Public Works"—it took four days to cover the distance by means of two installments of railroad and two of canals. Algernon S. Roberts also was a director in the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mountjoy and Lancaster Rail Road Company, which would be a key link in the new Pennsylvania. Thanks to this influence, George B. Roberts received a post as rodman in one of the surveying parties at \$40 a month.

At the time he was described as a "cheerful, chubby faced, curly headed young man." He reported for work on March 5, 1851, a snowy day, too, to R. W. Clarke, in charge of the corps of engineers at Summit House in Cambria County, the highest point the new railroad would reach in the Allegheny Mountains, and site of some of the most difficult railroad construction of that time. Judging by the letters he received, his work was the principal concern of the family at Pencoyd. Parents, brother and sisters all combined to keep him abreast of local news, informed on larger affairs through books and periodicals, well in body and mind through good advice. Sometimes these elements were combined. When his brother Algernon advised against taking strong drink in the Alleghenies (the roughness of society there was a major point of worry at Pencoyd), he also reported on the marriage of their cousin, Sidney Roberts, to Sarah Carstairs of the distilling family. Algernon thought her "particularly well off" in being able to change that name for Roberts. Their sister, Gainor, was anxious because she was sure "the Society you mingle with will certainly leave its stamp," and Cousin Owen Jones said there was no worse place in Pennsylvania than Cambria County.



In fact, the youth's manners and morals seem to have been proof against any bad example, but his health was adversely affected by a case of typhoid fever which left him with some impairment of the heart valves. However, there remained in the Roberts family stories of the tenderness with which one family in the Cambria County nursed the young engineer through his dangerous illness.

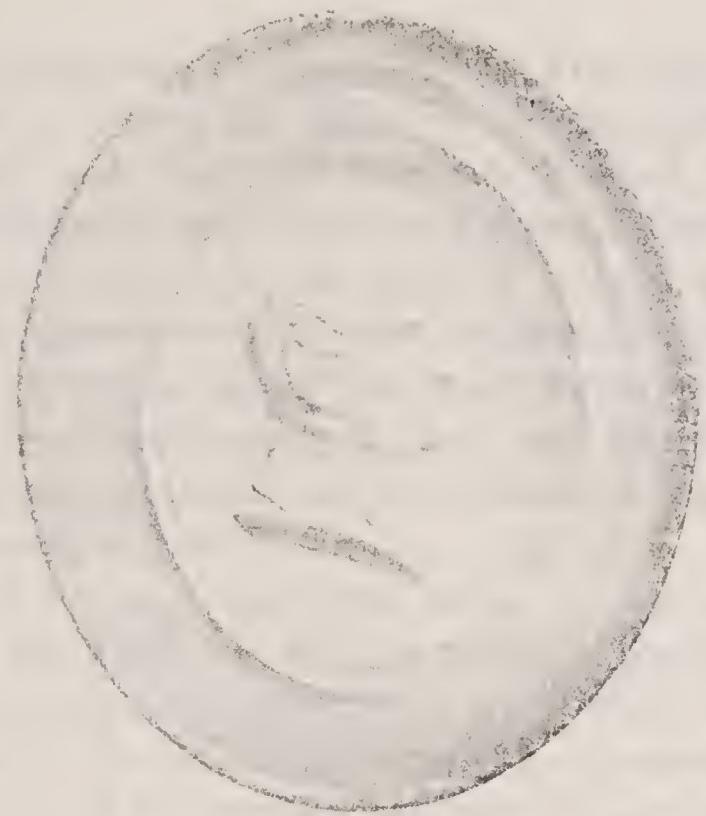
Both before and after it, George wrote with enthusiasm about his work.

"I think that our road will be one of the greatest in the United States," he confided. "We cross the summit of the mountain at Sugar Run Gap, having a tunnel at that place 3700 feet long."

This is the famous Gallitzin Tunnel, actually 3570 feet, begun while George was there. He also seems to have helped survey the famous Horseshoe Curve, one of the wonders of American engineering, for years later when he took his children to see it, he would jokingly tell them he could make a better one if he tried again.

In another letter George reported that J. Edgar Thomson and Edward Miller, chief and assistant chief engineer, paid a visit to the camp. "I was introduced to them and found the latter very talkative and agreeable but the former almost mute as usual—talking very little to any of our Corps," the youth commented. But, as it turned out, the silent Thomson had watched the young rodman, at least closely enough to follow his career during the next few years, which "The Centennial History of the Pennsylvania Railroad" sums up:

"After a little more than a year of this (work as rodman) he went to the Sunbury and Erie as an assistant engineer, where he spent another year on the location of that line west from Sunbury, then another year on the North Pennsylvania Railroad (now Reading), projecting a line from Philadelphia to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. From this position, in 1854, he became principal assistant engineer of construction of



*Plaster bas relief bust of Isaac Warner Roberts by Howard Roberts, his cousin. Original now in the possession of the subject's grandson and namesake, who lived on Pencoyd land until 1959.*



the Northwestern Railroad of Pennsylvania (later the West Penn Division of the Pennsylvania) where he stayed till 1857; then to the Allentown Railroad, as chief engineer, and when this road was finished, to the Mahanoy and Broad Top Mountain, and then the Lorberry Creek Railroad, all of which eventually went into the Reading system. He wound up this interesting independent career as chief engineer of one of the West Jersey lines. So much moving about may seem unpurposeful, but in the expanding days of railroading it was not. On the contrary, it was the way to acquire experience and a professional reputation, and young Roberts succeeded in both."

Algernon Roberts was making his own successful career on the old Pencoyd property. On October 28, 1852, his mother wrote to George that "A & P Roberts (so the cousins had named their firm) think of beginning operations next week." The other big news, she reported, was the death of Daniel Webster and the coming presidential election which sent Franklin Pierce to the White House. Sentiment was aroused to the point that Mr. Roberts informed her younger son that "Your cousin Warner . . . is quite a politician, says he will not own Algn for a Roberts if he does not attend the Presidential Election."

Meanwhile at Pencoyd, the proprietor was paying the penalty of "taking care of everybody but himself," as his older son put it. He had grown forgetful and although he was sensitive about his failings, he tried hard to carry on. Nevertheless, by September 18, 1853, he had weakened so greatly that, Algernon wrote, the place would have to be farmed by tenants since selling Pencoyd was out of the question. It was the beginning of a long period of tenants and hired managers, extending far beyond the lifetime of Isaac Warner Roberts, who in fact died at his home almost exactly six years later, on September 19, 1859, and was buried in the Merion Meeting graveyard. He was just 70 years old.

His widow, who had superintended the tenants and managed the household during her husband's illness, continued in these roles for more than a dozen years, since both her sons were far too greatly preoccupied with their careers. The Pencoyd Iron Works had been making axles for railroad cars and locomotives, but in the year his father died Algernon conceived the idea of manufacturing wrought iron and cast iron bridges. He was the first and for a long time the only firm in the field.

With the outbreak of the Civil War both Algernon and George Roberts took on new responsibilities. The iron works kept the older brother tied so closely to war and related orders that he could not, as he had hoped, enlist. As a compensation to his feelings, he equipped and trained a company of militia. He also had become a highly enlightened em-



ployer for that day; he built neat and comfortable cottages for his employes, as well as a school for their children, and was "projecting" a library to serve the growing workmen's community. George, who had not been forgotten by the old chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad, was called back into that line's service. Thomson had become President of the road and was the principal author of its great expansion. He had the Board of Directors create the post of assistant to the President for George Roberts on May 28, 1862. For a young engineer not yet 30 years old, it was an enormous step forward.

Both young men could now spend a good deal of their time at Pencoyd, but they left farm problems to their mother. Rosalinda Roberts was fully capable of handling them, too, as her diary of these years shows. These little books chronicle the progress of crops and housekeeping, but she also found time to note the chief happenings in the war and to visit hospitals in Philadelphia with fruit and eggs, milk and clothing for wounded soldiers. She also carried out a steady procession of improvements on the place. On April 15, 1863, she noted that sand and drain pipes had been brought "for beginning the long talked of stables and carriage house." Actually this was a remodelling of the existing stables, and it was not completed until September. Meantime a new iron pump had been installed in the washhouse. In April, 1864, "began putting up a stairway for the accommodation of the girls to get to the attic," and in September had another well dug. In between she chronicled some of the war's high cost of living. A servant girl actually gave notice that she wanted \$2 a week but came down to \$1.75 "which is quit as much as she can earn." The carpenter had charged \$56 for the new stairway "and other jobs." A painter sent a bill for \$20 "for painting both piazzas [which is the first we hear of them] and the new work in the house," which had included considerable new plastering as well as the stairs.

The last mention of the war or its effects is on June 30, 1864, when "the great Sanitary Fair for the soldiers" closed in Philadelphia. After that Rosalinda Roberts was so busy with more improvements for Pencoyd that she did not jot down comments on what went on in the world outside. For in 1866 she projected not only a new kitchen, the old one to be turned into a dining room, but also a system of running water inside the house and a real bathroom.

The running water was to be supplied by a waterwheel turned by a stream which flowed out of a spring near the house. The water was lifted by this contraption to a cedar tank built into the attic and delivered from there by gravity to the new kitchen and to the bedrooms, or at least the master bedroom. Day by day the mistress of the establish-



ment chronicled progress—she began turning the old kitchen into a dining room, trenches were being dug for pipe, pipe was laid, foundations were dug for the new kitchen, the old washhouse came down, the water-wheel arrived. Then for days on end she noted how many plumbers were at work in the house, sometimes two, sometimes three. At last on May 8:

"The water commenced running into the Cedar Tank today; it is quite a memorable event. I hope will give satisfaction."

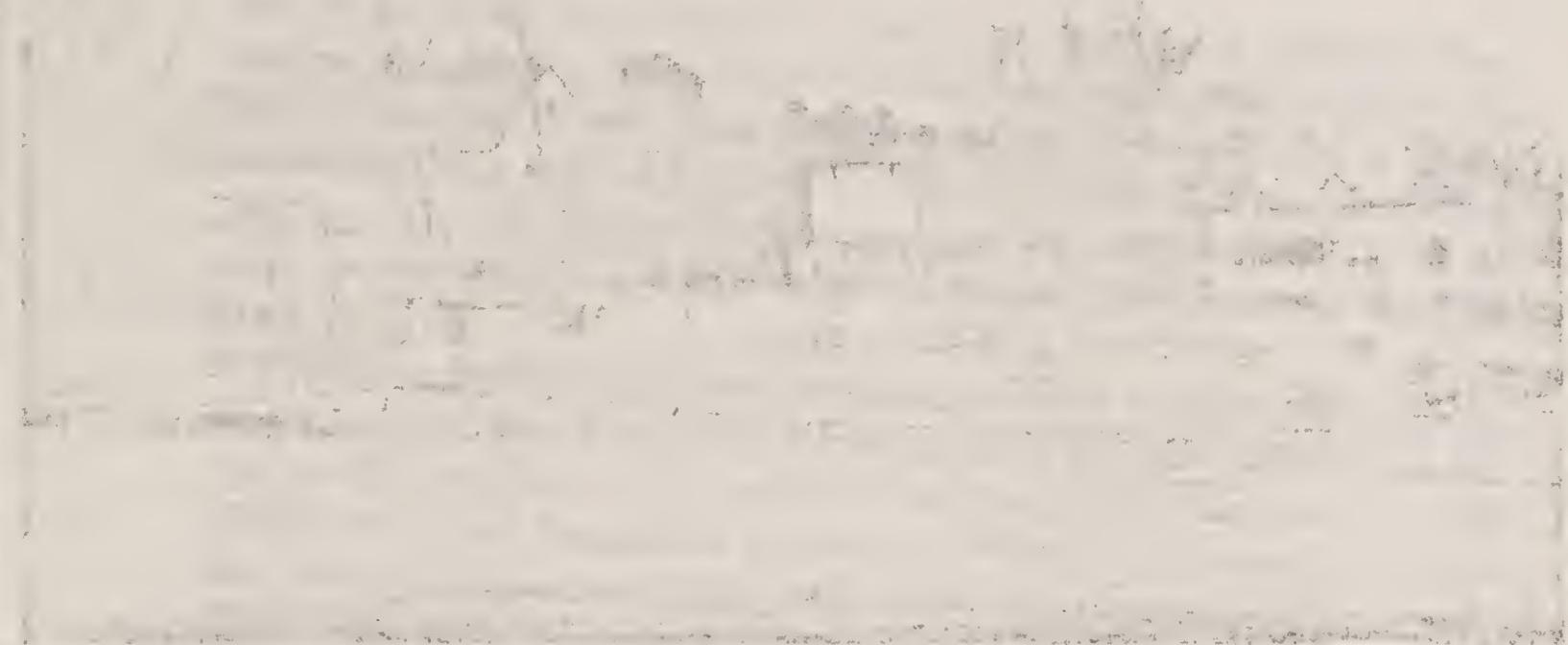
But, alas, the very next day's entry reports: "Our Tank is almost full of Water but Leaks some the Plumbers and Winkler (their boss) are at work until at last "the Plumbers have fixed the water arrangement in my room." On May 15 the kitchen was finished except for painting, on May 29 the new bathroom: water flowed into the kitchen for the first time on May 30, and after further entries about additional plumbing work, painters and laying of carpets, the family took dinner in the new dining room for the first time on June 23, and Rosalinda added triumphantly: "Plenty of water both hot and cold." The bathroom apparently is the one which, built on posts next to but outside the house, her grandchildren remembered years later as being the only one in the house, and also reserved for the use of their parents.

A few months later is an entry which explains why the house at Pencoyd contains somewhat fewer solid mementoes of its past than one might expect from a place which has been in one family's hands—for the entry describes what seems to have been a regular practice. It reads:

"George Hansell [one of the hired men] took a load of old Furniture to Auction and brought home Sugar, Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, Mackerel, Soap, Starch, Sweet Potatoes and a Box of Candles, 40 lb at 18 cts. pr. lb."

The next year, 1867, brought events of a quite different sort to engage her interest. As the year was ending, she noted that there had been two happenings which she "thought of with much pleasure." They were "GBR engagement and Algn visit to Europe." The first, one gathers, was not much of a surprise because George had been seeing a great deal of Miss Sarah Brinton. Throughout the engagement, too, she remained "Miss Brinton" to Rosalinda although the future mother-in-law was very fond of her. The formal announcement had taken place while Algernon was on his European tour; he had accompanied Owen Jones, husband of his half-sister, who was seeking to regain health impaired by gallant service in the army during the war. When news of his brother's engagement reached him, Algernon wrote from Vienna that the girls "must be in a perfect pepper jib about it"—such was the slang of the day—but his chief desire was that "Aunt Gainor—give me





*Pencoyd barnyard about 1920. The large stone building at the left is the barn Algernon Roberts built in 1791 and which earned him a Quaker reprimand—too ostentatious.*

Miss Brinton's family and who they have had for cooks for a long time back and how they cooked."

George and Sarah were married on June 9, 1868, in St. Stephen's Church in Philadelphia—his mother had been attending the Episcopal Church for some time, the first mention of it in her diary being November 4, 1866, although Algernon still went to Meeting—and from this time forward George Brooke Roberts is listed as an Episcopalian. The young couple went to Europe for a four-month's honeymoon, during which the bridegroom also took occasion to study railroads abroad. On their return, the bride was a full-fledged member of the Roberts clan, for Rosalinda refers to her now as "Sallie."

But tragedy was waiting for the family at Pencoyd. Only a few weeks after the bridal couple returned, Algernon had to have a carbuncle lanced and—such was the lack of ordinary sterilizing precautions—blood poisoning developed. He died at Pencoyd on November 5, 1868, in his forty-first year. A published obituary more accurately appraised him than is usual for such documents, his brother always thought, when it said:

"The working man has lost a true friend, and the business community one of its most useful and active members, the friends of our public school system one of its most zealous supporters and the social circle in which he moved one of its brightest ornaments."

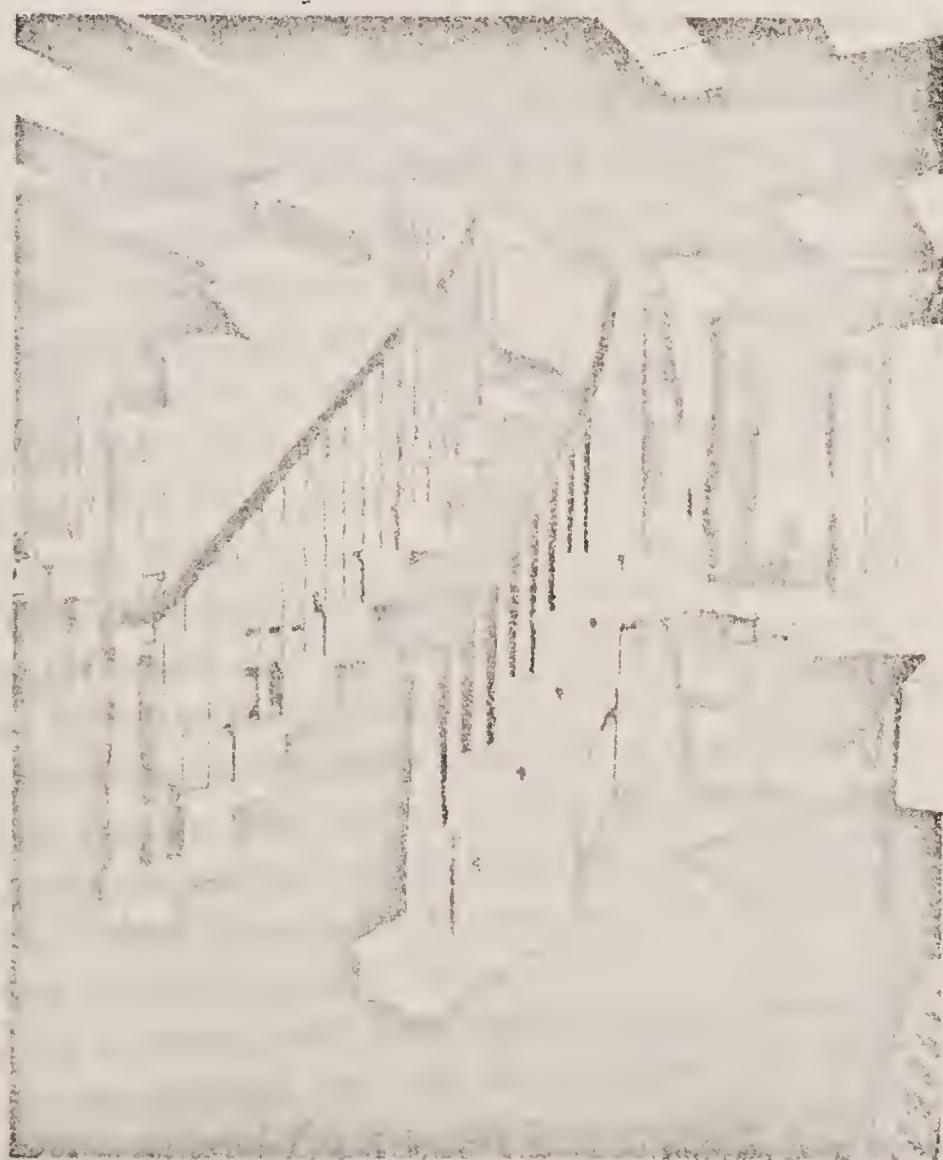
The spring of 1869 seemed to bring compensations. Rosalinda, who had stopped keeping her diary for months after Algernon's death, began to write of Pencoyd happenings again, a carpenter coming to discuss putting a portico on the tenant house, the end of spring housecleaning



and so on. Then she stopped, for Sallie was to have a child in May, and on the third of that month George was appointed to the newly created post of Fourth Vice President of the Pennsylvania, a grand promotion for a man of only 36. On May 24, Sallie Roberts gave birth to a son, George Brinton Roberts, but as was still the case in those days, motherhood was a medically hazardous affair and she died on June 7.

Rosalinda Roberts lived long enough to see her younger son elevated to the Second Vice Presidency of his road at 40. She herself was 73, but as early as March, 1872, was so weak that she did not care to write in her own hand the details of how she wanted her property divided. She dictated these to George and signed the document with a very shaky signature. It was not a formal will, merely a letter to her son telling him what she wanted him to do for her step-daughters, her grandchildren, various other relatives and so on. Her own property—Pencoyd of course would go to the children with its land, buildings, stock and equipment—was valued at about \$71,000, most of it in securities. She lived for more than a year after the letter was signed, dying at Pencoyd on June 21, 1873.

*Interior of Pencoyd,  
showing staircase  
and rafters.*





# Chapter VI

## George B. Roberts, Sixth Proprietor (1833-1897)

Most prominent of all Pencoyd's proprietors so far as the outside world was concerned, George Brooke Roberts made more changes in the old house than all his predecessors put together, although he was the first of them to live away from the farm for a large part of each year. He returned to it, though, as soon as he could. His affection for it was indicated by the considerable building he undertook, his interest in the local community, the feeling for Pencoyd with which his children grew up, and indeed in his becoming sole owner of the place. One of his first acts after his mother died was to buy the shares of his half-sisters, Rebecca and Gainor, for whom he built a house at 267 South 19th Street in Philadelphia.

The next year, on October 17, 1874, he married Miriam Pyle Williams of Philadelphia, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Pyle Williams. The ceremony was performed in Philadelphia's Epiphany Church. The bride had been born in 1846, and was a descendant of both Dr. Thomas Wynne and Dr. Edward Jones, who had been leaders in the establishment of the Welsh Tract. Five children were born of this union—Algeron Brooke Roberts, 1875-1909; Thomas Williams Roberts, 1877-; Elizabeth Williams Roberts, 1879-1959; Isaac Warner Roberts, 1881-; and Miriam Williams Roberts, 1888-.

In the year of his marriage, George Roberts became First Vice President of the Pennsylvania Railroad. His old chief, J. Edgar Thomson, had died to be succeeded by his principal aide, Col. Thomas A. Scott, such a dynamic force in the organization and expansion of the line that many outsiders thought he was the real power. In fact, his talents and those of Thomson so complemented each other that they seem to have worked as an almost perfect team. Now Roberts took the role long held by Scott, with even a few added responsibilities.

"This rapid elevation of a young man with no previous experience in railroad operations or management can only be explained by sheer hardworking ability," the Centennial History, comments. "None of his contemporaries accuse him of undue aggressiveness, rather, they speak



of his modesty and gentleness of manner, and his willingness to hear all sides of a question. Needless to say, his association with Thomson and Scott gave him a schooling in railroad executive work which could not have been duplicated anywhere in this country."

In 1880, thanks to this schooling, he was elected to succeed Scott as President. For the next seventeen years he controlled the destinies of the nation's largest railroad through an era of expansion which tripled the Pennsylvania's freight traffic and doubled the passenger volume. It was also an era of bitter rate wars, difficult financial problems and rapid technological progress. Roberts dealt with all of them in a manner which left the Pennsylvania vastly strengthened as well as greatly enlarged.

But because of his business, the family spent only the good weather months at Pencoyd during the first dozen years of his Presidency—T. W. Roberts remembers seeing the famous blizzard of March, 1888 from the town house at 1901 Spruce Street—and the children attended their first schools in Philadelphia. The farm continued in the hands of tenants, although as they grew old enough, all the boys helped in the farm work. Beginning in 1893 they were living in the old house all the year around. By then it was much easier to get to town, an 1890 entry in George Roberts's diary noting:

"The new bridge at City Avenue was opened for public use on May 30th—it is a very fine bridge. The City surfaced City Avenue and put up lamps so we now have a splendid Road over the River."

The house was expanded and altered so greatly that it looked like a quite different sort of dwelling than before. George tore down the wing which his father had built and in its place erected an even larger extension, as tall as the original house but of a different style of architecture. In the course of time he also added in other directions a new drawing room, dining room, morning room and sunporch, relocated the driveway and built various porches and balconies. Indoors the main part of the house was redecorated to conform to the fashions of the day.

The President of the Pennsylvania Railroad remained enough of a farmer to take a very keen interest in his land, especially in the farm houses and buildings. He kept a diary of farm matters which teems with references to construction projects. The only entry for 1879 notes: "This summer we tore down the old frame buildings east of the Barn and erected the new addition and made a cellar under the old wing." This diary was kept with some regularity from 1886 to 1896. In the first of those years he chronicled the building of a new farm house (still standing), a new stone wall, garden tool house and new chicken house. Old sheds were torn down, corn crib and wagon shed moved.



*Sketch of Pencoyd drawn by George R. Roberts in 1819, the first picture of the house ever made. At the left is the original structure built by John Roberts; the smaller addition on the right was erected by the engineer-artist's father.*

Similar entries run through the rest of the diary, along with those telling of new porches or windows or rooms for the main house.

The water wheel installed by Rosalinda Roberts served the next generation, but in 1892 George substituted a 150-foot well and deep well pump, which was to be Pencoyd's water supply for sixty years. Until far along in the 1890s this pump delivered the water to Rosalinda's old wooden tank in the attic, from which gravity fed the rest of the house. The overflow from this tank supplied also the home of the farmer, Jonathan Harding, near City Line, and it was long remembered in the family that when they heard the water running down the pipes, George Roberts' half-sister, Rebecca, would say: "All is well at Pencoyd: the water is running to Jonathan's."

Lighting underwent a similar revolution. Candles and oil lamps gave way to naphtha—the highly inflammable stuff was stored in a tank outside the house—furnishing a whiter, clearer, steadier light than anything possible with wax or kerosene. Then came gas and the Welsbach mantles, with which Pencoyd was plentifully supplied, a still further improvement. In the 1890s, about ten years after the introduction of electric lights in Philadelphia, George had the house wired to use Mr. Edison's new incandescent bulbs.

Lower Merion was growing fast, although still largely agricultural; it had more grain and feed stores than coal yards, and an assessment



of 1882 revealed the existence of 1,536 cattle and 863 horses. The pattern of shopping is disclosed by the count of fourteen general stores, but only one grocery and three drug stores. The population, according to the census of 1880, was 6,287, and one of the nine villages in the township was named Pencoyd. It was by no means the smallest, boasting seventy houses, its own postoffice, two stores and a hotel. The village was named for and centered around the iron works, which employed more than 500 workers. Within the village also was the West Laurel Hill Cemetery.

The pattern of life throughout the area was changing, thanks to a development with which George Roberts had more to do than most of the residents. This was the rise of the commuting train. The Robertses were only one of the many families, and not one of the first, whose head worked in Philadelphia but lived in the suburbs. Improvements in passenger cars, locomotives, roadbeds and stations made possible a comfortable and rapid service which started the great American urban habit of commuting. The Pennsylvania Railroad in George Roberts' administration did a great deal to speed that development: the offices put out persuasive publicity designed to entice people to the villages along "the Main Line." At first commuting was a summer practice only. As the city grew more crowded and trains more comfortable, more and more families remained in the country all year round. It was then, observing the lavish displays of affection when young wives saw their husbands off to work and met them on their return, that old, sardonic railroad men called the stations of the Main Line "the kissing stops." It was due directly to George Roberts that Welsh names were given to so many of them—Bala, Bryn Mawr and the rest. Bala, of course, was not exactly on the Main Line, but it and its twin Cynwyd were named by the owner of Pencoyd in memory of traditional places from which the first settlers of the Welsh Tract had come.

Although he was winning the high opinion of veteran railroaders for putting the Pennsylvania on a stable and progressive footing, Roberts was not one of those executives who brings his problems and his triumphs into the home. Apparently he did not indulge in shop talk at Pencoyd, and the family did not hear from him stories of his dealings with such financial giants as J. P. Morgan or such eminent competitors as Chauncey Depew of the New York Central. But one incident in which all three were involved is representative of the era and the men. Early in the Roberts Presidency of the Pennsylvania, the New York Central began work on a roadbed for a South Pennsylvania Railroad which would cross the Alleghenies in direct competition with the Pennsylvania. The New York Central, second only to the Pennsylvania among Ameri-



can lines at this time, was controlled by the Vanderbilts but headed by Depew. While this work was a direct threat to the Pennsylvania, there was talk that the Pennsylvania might challenge the New York Central in its own territory by buying the then bankrupt West Shore Railroad. If the Pennsylvania had acquired this company, it could have offered strong competition between New York and Albany.

Before this situation could develop its full potentialities for a serious railroad war, Morgan stepped into the picture. He was interested ostensibly as the marketer of American railroad securities in Europe, where investors would be likely to distrust such a conflict. He also had a general, abiding distaste for cut-throat competition. One day in 1885 when the work on the South Pennsylvania was well along, he invited both Roberts and Depew to accompany him on a short cruise on his famous yacht, the *Corsair*. By the time the yacht tied up at her berth again, the New York Central had agreed to sell its controlling share of the South Pennsylvania to Roberts' company. There was no more talk of the West Shore, which the New York Central bought that same fall. In fact, the "Centennial History of the Pennsylvania" says: "From aught that can be discovered the two transactions were entirely unrelated." In any case, the South Pennsylvania was abandoned. Part of its roadbed and some of its tunnels were acquired much later by the State and were incorporated into the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

The Roberts children growing up at Pencoyd were more likely to hear from their father stories of his surveying days on the railroad. They were also more likely to admire, of his later achievements, such imposing structures as the new Broad Street Station. He had proposed this, and won approval for it, while still First Vice President. Hitherto the terminal had been in West Philadelphia near Thirtieth Street and Market, an inconvenient location for downtown businessmen and hotels. Besides the new station, the project involved elevating the tracks of the Pennsylvania all the way in from the west bank of the Schuylkill—Roberts was a bit ahead of his time in a passion for eliminating grade crossings all over the Pennsylvania system. The station was opened in 1881, and encouraged traffic so greatly that it had to be enlarged within a few years. The new work was completed by 1894, giving the road an imposing ten-story office building as well as a train shed 591 feet long and 306 wide with an immense arched glass-topped roof which rose 100 feet above the tracks at the highest point and was one of the sights of the city until fire destroyed it in 1923.

By the time he moved his offices into the new building, Roberts had succeeded in stabilizing the Pennsylvania system so thoroughly that in the severe depression which was raging, the credit of the company



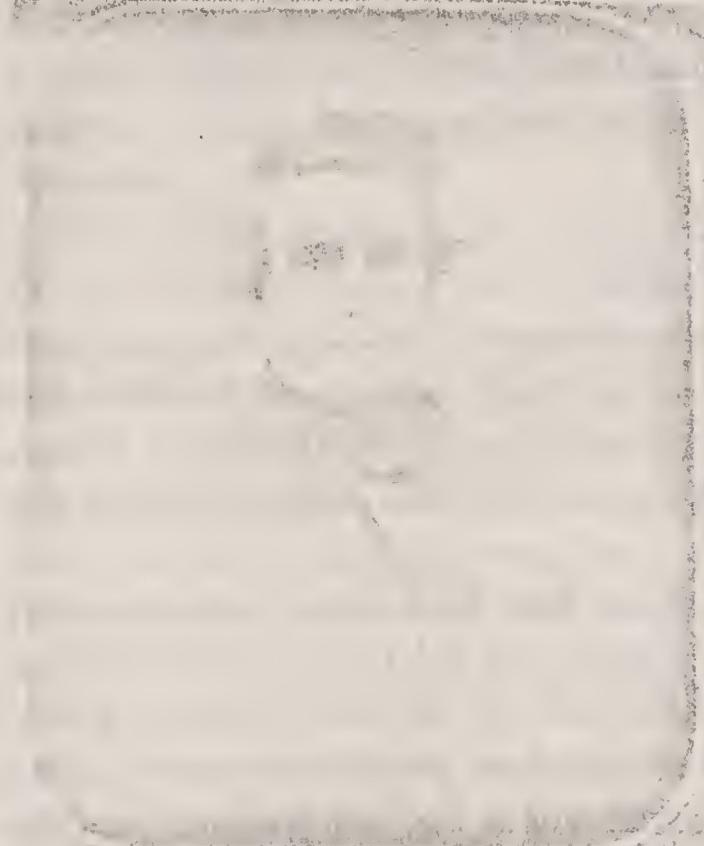
stood as high as that of the United States Government. But, according to the "Centennial History," one of his earliest feats was his most spectacular. This was the acquisition in 1881 of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad. Its main line was the middle of the route from New York to Washington, and it had to be bought in negotiations which successfully outwitted Jay Gould. In the complicated manoeuvres there were also involved John W. Garrett of the Baltimore and Ohio, Russell Sage, August Belmont and John Jacob Astor. Roberts had to close the deal without time to plan its financing; the total price was a little more than \$17,000,000. Then he won approval of the Board of Directors and a vote of the stockholders to authorize a stock issue to raise the money.

Some of the talent which went into the management of the railroad was also at the disposal of the community in and around Pencoyd. George Roberts served as one of the directors of the Free Library of Philadelphia and as vice president of the Fairmount Park Art Association, which was active in improvements at the park after the unprecedented success of the Centennial Exposition there in 1876. He also was active in the Art Club, the Farmers' Club (which was the successor to the original Society for Promoting Agriculture) and the Church Club, and was a member of the Pennsylvania Historical Society and the Sons of the American Revolution.

He and his sisters gave the land on which St. Asaph's Church was built—it had been part of Pencoyd—and George was largely responsible for the building itself. Later he served as the first Rector's Warden.

At Pencoyd, the last decade of the Nineteenth Century seems to have been chiefly concerned with children. G. Brinton Roberts, six years older than his nearest half-brother, was away at school a good deal. But to all the children, these were the years and Pencoyd the place of their principal childhood memories. There was still excellent hunting along the river and in the woodlots where now office and apartment buildings stand. There the boys were taught to shoot by old Cassius Harris, the part-Indian coachman, who also imparted a good deal of woods lore. All the children learned to ride and drive horses as a matter of course, but one pony given to the older girl, Elizabeth, was a little out of the ordinary. He was an ex-circus performer named Simon, and when he first came to Pencoyd amused everyone by trotting in circles around the pasture from force of habit. He also retained his circus tricks, which he could use to throw a youthful rider and run back to the stables. But Elizabeth made such a pet of him that when she took her brothers for a drive in her pony cart she made them get out and push on the hills to help Simon.





There was no thought at Pencoyd, nor at most homes in the country, that the crazy inventors and mechanics who were experimenting with horseless carriages in the 1890's would end the era of the horse. The roads of Lower Merion, as throughout rural and suburban areas, were unpaved. Philadelphia still had miles of cobblestone streets; the further use of such "paving with pebbles" had been stopped only in 1881. Horsecars were the principal means of public rapid transit; the first electric streetcar system that worked was inaugurated in Richmond in 1888. Only a very few people suspected that the experiments of a couple of teachers at Boys' Central High School and Houston, were developing patents second only in importance to those of Thomas A. Edison in opening up the age of electricity.

It was on the threshold of this age that, in August, 1896, the valvular heart condition from which George Roberts had suffered at intervals since his surveying days took an alarming turn for the worse. He went to Northeast Harbor, Maine, where he had taken his family on vacation, but failed to improve. Returning to Pencoyd, he grew slowly weaker and weaker and died on January 30, 1897, two weeks after his sixty-fourth birthday.

His death was a major news event in the worlds of transportation, industry and finance. Many tributes were paid to the man and his work; one of the most significant was that expressed by his chief rival among the new race of business managers which was rising to pre-eminence over the old owner-managers in American enterprise. This rival was Chauncey Depew of the New York Central, who said:

"Though loyal in every fibre to the Pennsylvania, he was fair and just in his dealings with other lines. He appreciated, as few do, the relations of the railways to the public, and was broad and liberal in his views of railway management. He brought his company to the highest position of efficiency and was one of the members of our profession and the master of the business. The appreciation of his associates was

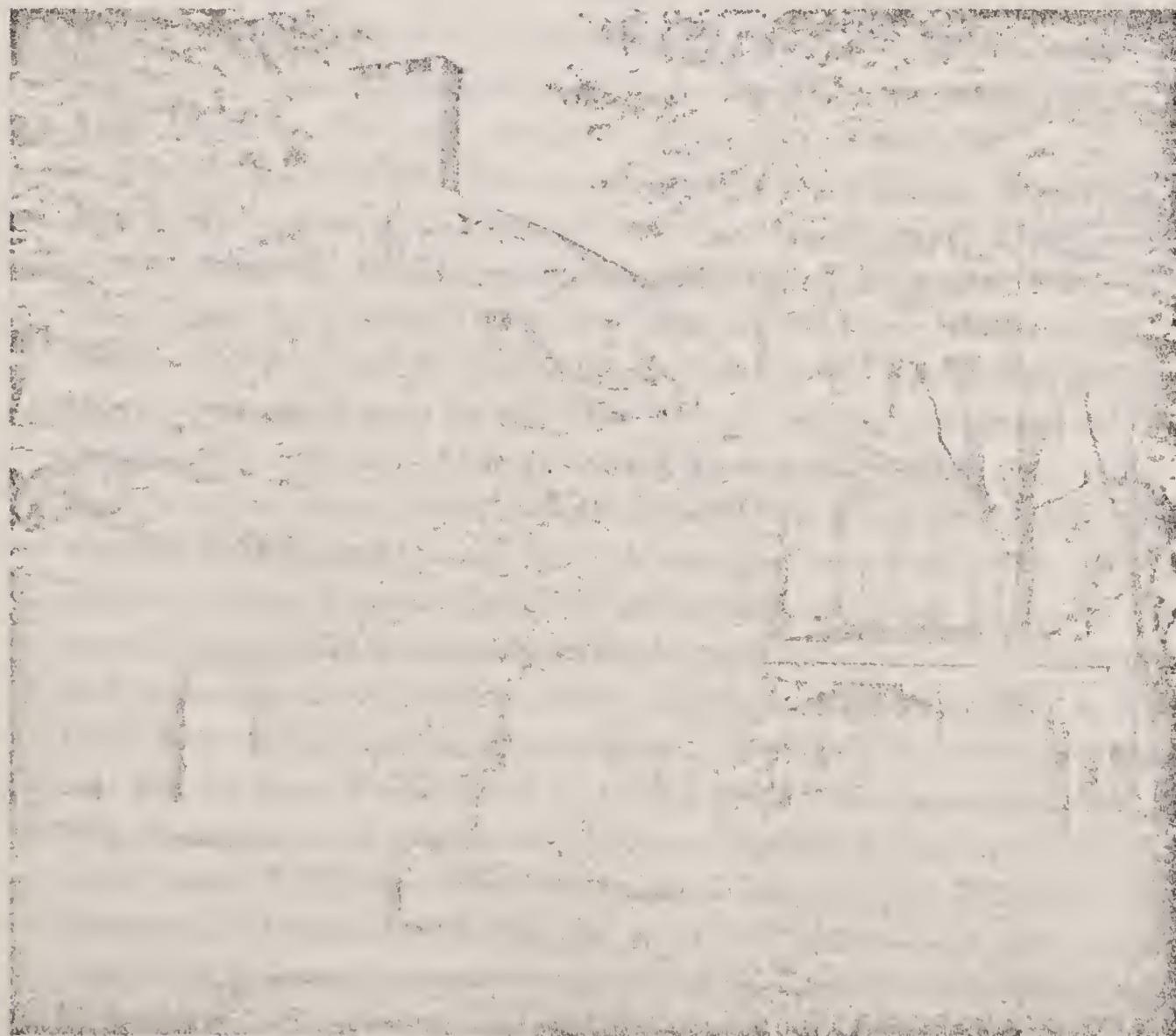
*George Brooke Roberts at 21.  
From a daguerreotype at Pencoyd.*



best indicated by their electing him president of every association they have formed in the last ten years. A great railway man, a conscientious and chivalrous gentleman and a patriotic citizen has been lost to the country in the death of George B. Roberts."

In his term of office the Pennsylvania had invested in road and equipment more money than in all its previous history put together, just over \$50,000,000. An even greater sum went into the Pennsylvania's purchases of the stocks and bonds of affiliated companies, the total increases in investment amounting to about \$115,000,000. It was regarded as a notable achievement, largely due to the prudent administration of the President, that slightly more than one-third of this was obtained from earnings, the rest from sale of the company's own stock and bonds.

In his will, George B. Roberts provided that each of his six children was to have a share of Pencoyd land sufficient for his or her own house. But at the time of his death all of them were living at home and it was only some years later that it was decided the old stone house with its cluster of subsidiary buildings should pass to his third son, T. Williams Roberts.



*Pencoyd in 1870, from an early photograph.*



# Chapter VII

## T. Williams Roberts, Seventh Proprietor (1877- )

A student at Princeton when his father died, T. Williams Roberts did not undertake the management of Pencoyd until some years after his graduation. Meanwhile the farm continued to be worked by hired managers, although it was still the principal Roberts residence. Even when the children married, the family circle remained intact in Lower Merion, for all of them built houses on land their father had left them, or on land adjoining Pencoyd.

Brinton Roberts was first, marrying Alice Tyson Butcher in 1898. Algernon Roberts married Elizabeth Binney Evans in 1902, by which time a young man from Germantown, Percy Hamilton Clark, was remarked by her brothers to be very assiduous in his attentions to Elizabeth Roberts. He rode over to court her across the bridge which spanned the Schuylkill where nearly 200 years before Robert Roberts had operated his ferry. Elizabeth became Mrs. Percy H. Clark in 1904.

Meanwhile T. W. Roberts had gone to work in the Pencoyd Iron Works for his cousin, Percival Roberts, Jr., son of the co-founder. There was remarkably little nepotism involved; the ironmaster, a reserved and aloof man in the view of his younger relatives, merely informed the new hand that he would have to bring his own lunch and that he would start at the bottom as helper to a sort of general troubleshooter in the plant. Every day the young man walked across the fields and down the lane to the iron works; he had been doing it for six months before his boss noticed that he never stopped at the pay window and commented on this omission, obviously supposing that a Roberts must have some special arrangement. Horrified to discover that this was not the case, he hastened to get his helper on the payroll, and from that time on, T. W. received a \$20 gold piece every two weeks. This lasted until 1900 when the works were sold to the American Bridge Company. (Percival Roberts, Jr. went with the works and when the American Bridge Company became part of United States Steel in 1902, he became a director of the new firm and moved to New York.) For some years after that, until 1909, Williams Roberts was in the coal



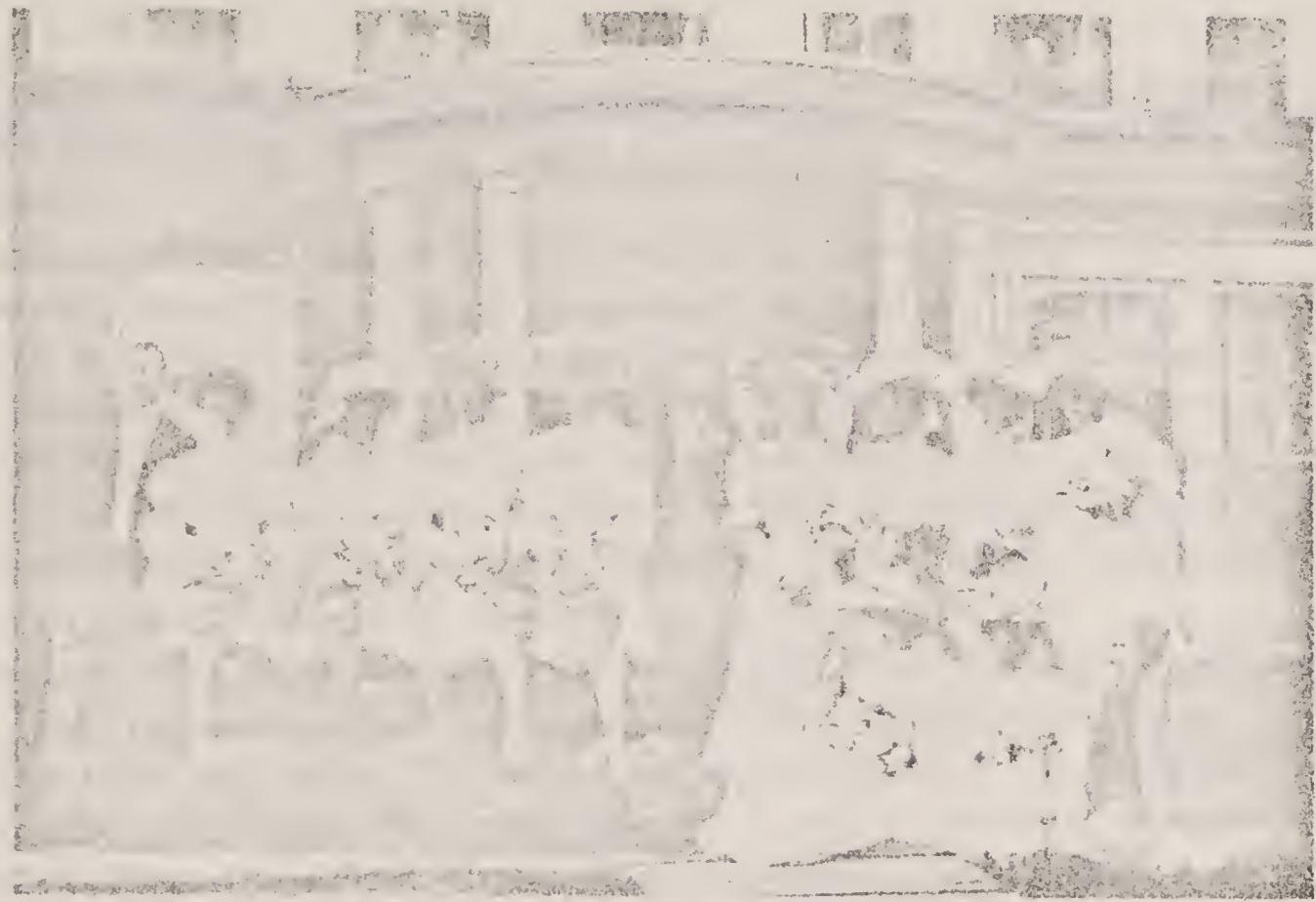
business. Meanwhile, in 1903, he and his younger brother, Isaac Warner Roberts, a lawyer by profession, took over Pencoyd Farm themselves.

Both had the enthusiasm for scientific agriculture which had distinguished their grandfather and great-grandfather. They set out to establish a fine herd of Guernsey dairy cattle, and they built up under the registered name of Pencoyd Farm a Guernsey herd with the second best producing record in the United States. Isaac Warner Roberts recalls that bulls of their breeding were to be found in every State where Guernsey herds existed except four, and that they sold one cow for the highest price ever paid up to that time for a Guernsey bred in the State of Pennsylvania, \$13.100. At the peak of their operations they cultivated about 175 acres. The younger brother was chiefly in charge of breeding and records, the elder of the grazing and growing of crops, production of milk, etc. Williams Roberts became so keen a dairy farmer that it was said in the family he thought a Guernsey cow was the most beautiful sight in the world.

Meanwhile his next older brother, Algernon, had displayed a flair for a career along lines quite new to a Roberts of Pencoyd. He had launched himself into politics as an independent Republican so successfully that by the time he passed his thirtieth birthday he was a member of the Pennsylvania Senate and had attracted the flattering if not altogether welcome attention of the acknowledged boss of Pennsylvania politics, United States Senator Boies Penrose. Algernon's leadership among the progressive elements in the Pennsylvania legislature and his growing popularity led Penrose to offer the Republican nomination for the governorship—equivalent to election in Pennsylvania at that time—if Algernon would join the regular organization. The young State Senator was not especially attracted by the condition, although sufficiently keen on politics to want the office. Early in 1909 he and his brothers discussed his answer in a family conference at Pencoyd. Algernon at the time was obviously ill although not bedridden—he suffered from tuberculosis, adequate treatment for which was yet to be discovered. At the urging of his brothers he agreed that he must first recover his health, and should so inform Penrose. To that end he went out to California, but there after a few months he died. He was only in his thirty-fourth year.

Besides being State Senator, he had served for a number of years as chairman of the Lower Merion Township Commission. T. W. Roberts, who had helped him in his campaigns, was appointed to fill out his terms on the Commission, and then ran for the office himself. He was elected to a three-year term of his own and then to another. Later, during World War I, he worked for the Red Cross and for military





*A wedding at Pencoyd. Photographed in 1901 when Elizabeth Williams Roberts was married to Percy Hamilton Clark.*

intelligence. But throughout this time his major interest was Pencoyd Farm.

His mother lived to see only the beginning of Pencoyd's rise to high rank among dairy farms. On January 17, 1913, Miriam Williams Roberts died in her sixty-seventh year. She had presided as mistress of Pencoyd house, although taking small interest in the management of the farm, for more than thirty-seven years.

Williams Roberts carried out almost as many changes at Pencoyd as his father, the most extensive remodelling being done between 1912 and 1915. Aside from the obvious modernizations in plumbing, heating and lighting, he undertook to give the old house back as much of its original flavor and atmosphere as possible. The architecture of the additions which George Roberts had built was modified to conform to that of the original structure. Brick chimneys, for example, were replaced by stone. Porches and balconies were removed; the entrance and approach were redesigned.

Indoors, especially in the downstairs section of the original house, the older look returned. A comparatively modern marble fireplace was ripped out and the big stone one restored according to descriptions furnished by the oldest members of the family. The early American look was recovered through bringing back hand hewn beams and wide board floors. Moulding such as had been removed to make way for the Victorian decor was found in a house belonging to the Brookes family



of Williams Roberts' grandmother, at Radnor; a splendid slab of stone for the hearth came from the house of a neighbor which was being demolished.

As Pencoyd Farm became better known for its Guernsey herd, which at one time numbered 75 head, the number of buildings increased as well. A new house was built for the farm manager; a tenant house and "boarding house" for farm hands already existed. In 1912, Isaac Warner Roberts built his own home on part of the old farm; he had married in 1909 Miss Caroline M. Henry. In 1915, T. Williams Roberts married Ellanor Cecilia Thompson, and, in 1922, Miriam Roberts, youngest child of George B. Roberts, married Spencer Ervin.

Pencoyd remained a working farm until 1929, when the dairy herd was sold. The fields which had been cultivated without interruption for 245 years were grazed by only a few cows kept by T. W. Roberts for several years more. Meanwhile, the two brothers carried on a real estate business, the Lower Merion Realty Company, which they had formed in 1906 and which was active in the development of the township for more than forty-five years. They continued in this together until 1931 when Isaac W. Roberts withdrew to join the staff of the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society, of which he later became President. He was also a director and later Chairman of the Philadelphia Contributionship, the original insurance company, a post he still holds, and a director of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Bell Telephone Company, etc. T. Williams Roberts operated the Lower Merion Realty Company until 1952, when it was dissolved, but he remained active in real estate under his own name and still is real estate agent for the Pennsylvania Hospital.

Pencoyd retained its rural setting right up to and even through World War II. Bala-Cynwyd became a modern village with movies and schools and a swelling suburban population. The village of Pencoyd shrank as the site of the Iron Works was occupied by other enterprises. The Pencoyd Works itself moved, at least so far as the name was concerned, across to the east bank of the Schuylkill where it is visible for a considerable distance as one approaches the old farm from Philadelphia. But the trees and gardens and meadows behind Pencoyd Farm's stone wall along City Line were only faintly disturbed by the encroachments of the city itself.

At this period, as throughout most of its existence, Pencoyd suffered no dearth of children. Twenty-nine of George Brooks Roberts' grandchildren had known the old place and had been brought up on or adjoining its ancestral acres; two others, children of Algernon Roberts, had died in infancy.





*T. Williams Roberts, seventh proprietor of Pencoyd, photographed in 1960 before the fireplace in the original part of the house built by his great-great-great-grandfather.*

By the time the twenty-nine had grown up, there was another generation, the ninth, to absorb the Pencoyd atmosphere. T. W. Roberts, Jr., who was the last child born in the old house, lived for several years of the 1950s in the farmhouse his grandfather had built in 1886. The eighth generation's Algernon Roberts, eldest son of Isaac W., had occupied it from 1938 to 1953 with time out for service in the Army during World War II, and his three children were reared here. Brooke Roberts, Isaac W.'s youngest son, had a house on original Pencoyd land until 1959, and his three children spent their early childhood on the place.

During the war, the original Pencoyd house was also enlivened by the ninth generation of John Roberts' descendants. Four of the owner's grandchildren were born in these years when his two married daughters lived with their father while their husbands served with the armed forces. Since the latter part of the 1940s, however, except for visits,



the Roberts family of Pencoyd has consisted of T. Williams and his daughter, Gainor.

About the time that the last of the owner's grandchildren left after the war, the changes caused by Philadelphia's growth began to crowd in upon the old house. Most of them, in fact, took place during the 1950s, until at their close the land which actually belonged to the Pencoyd house consisted of about twenty acres of John Roberts' original 150-acre tract back in 1683. Along the river now there are tall apartment houses and just across City Line considerable housing developments, while office buildings rise on either side of Pencoyd. One expects this trend will continue, for it takes but a few minutes to drive into downtown Philadelphia along motor highways that follow only roughly the roads which those early promoters of improved transportation, Robert Roberts and John Roberts 2d., helped lay out in the Eighteenth Century.

Behind the foliage which still screens Pencoyd in the summer and within the massive stone walls which John Roberts built so long ago, it still is possible to ignore the metropolis outside. But not forever, not even indefinitely, since the inexorable advance of urbanization has crowded out the spacious way of life enjoyed by the Roberts family of Pencoyd for so long. They have not been willing to give it up without a struggle. Considerable study was given to the possibilities of preserving Pencoyd, if not entirely as a family home, perhaps as a museum or historical shrine. It was hoped that the house might be restored to just what it was when John Roberts built it, open to the public as an example of our Seventeenth Century domestic architecture and a memento of our history as a nation. But it has been found that such a plan is not feasible, although the records and documents of historical value will be kept together. The house itself could have at best only an approximate and therefore unsatisfying restoration in the absence of early drawings, builder's sketches or even written descriptions.

Because that is a fact, this account of Pencoyd has been written. It is the purpose of these pages to preserve the story of the old house and those who have lived in it, not only for their descendants but also for those to whom this cross-section of the larger story of America itself in these years may be of interest or value.



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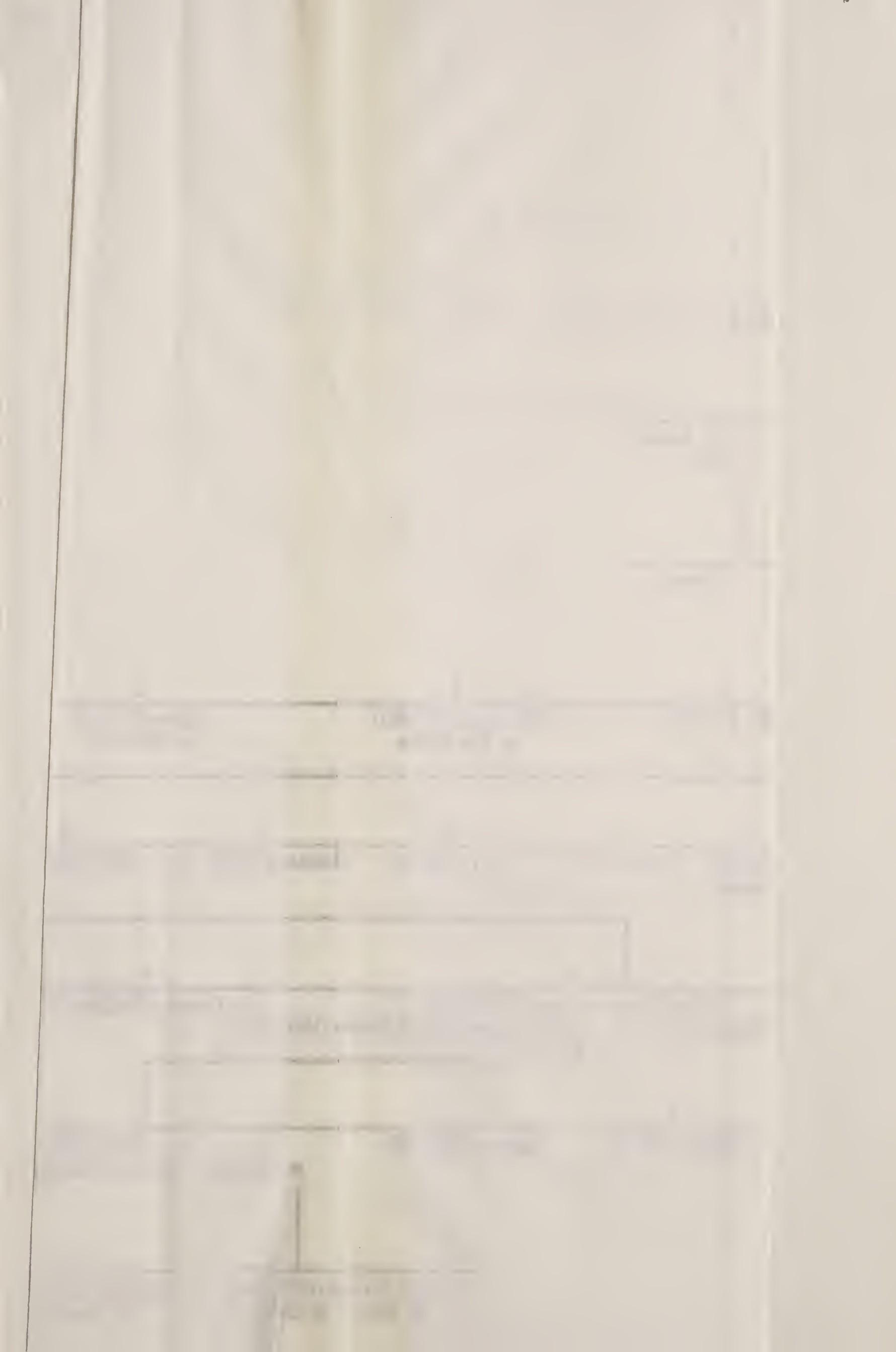
This account of a house and a family is based primarily upon documents preserved at Pencoyd — letters, wills, deeds, diaries, account books, receipts — dating back to the original contract for purchase of the property, executed in England. Other documentary sources have been papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Archives, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore, Pa., and Philadelphia city records. Much of this material was assembled and collated by George Valentine Massey 2d. Guidance in the use of the Pencoyd and other relevant data was provided by Mr. T. Williams Roberts, present proprietor of Pencoyd, and his daughter, Miss Gainor Roberts. They and Mr. Isaac Warner Roberts supplied also much of the oral tradition of the family background and family anecdotes. In addition the following authorities were consulted:

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Robert Thomas Morris (ca. 1580)

Richard Roberts (ca. 1615)  
m. Margaret Evans

Robert Pugh  
m. Elizabeth William Owen

John Roberts (ca. 1648-1724) married Gaynor Robert (ca. 1653-1722)

Hugh Robert  
m. Jane .....

1                    2  
Robert Roberts (1685-1768)  
m. Sidney Rees (1690-1764)

Elizabeth (1692-1746)

Edward

1                    2  
John Roberts (1710-76)  
m. Rebecca Jones (1710-79)

Alban (1712-27)

Rees (1715-55)

4                    5  
Phineas (1722-1801)  
m. Ann Wynne

5  
Sidney (1729-93)  
m. John Paul

1                    2  
Jonathan (1734-1799)  
m. Elizabeth Carter

Gainor (1736-61)

Alban (1738-72)

3                    4  
Elizabeth (1740-82)  
m. Thomas Palmer

Mary (1742-71)

5                    6  
Tacy (1744-91)

7                    8  
Benjamin (1746- )

John (1747-1803)

9                    10  
Robert (1749-93)

Algernon Roberts (1751-1815)  
m. Tacy Warner (1761-1828)

11                  12  
Franklin (1752-74)

Edward (1755-1825)

1                    2                    3  
Rebecca (1782-99)   Lydia (1783-1862)   John (1787-1837)

4                    5                    6  
Isaac Warner Roberts (1789-1859)  
m. (1) Emily Thomas (1795-1825)   m. (2) Rosalinda Evans Brooke (1800-73)

7                    8                    9  
Gainor (1791-1868)   Ann (1793-1826)   Elizabeth (1795-1837)

10                  11                  12  
m. Miles C. Carpenter   Algernon S. of Windermere (1798-72)   Edward (1800-72)   George W. (1802-57)   Tacy (1805-47)

1                    2                    3  
Rebecca (1817-99)   Mary (1819-1900)  
m. Col. Owen Jones of Wynnewood

Gainor (1821-98)   Emily (1823-24)

4                    5  
Algernon (1828-68)

6                    7                    8  
George Brooke Roberts (1833-97)  
m. (1) Sarah L. Brinton (1846-69)   m. (2) Miriam Pyle Williams (1846-1913)

9                    10                  11  
Percival   Howard

1                    2                    3                    4                    5  
George Brinton (1869-1945)   Algernon Brooke (1875-1909)   Thomas Williams Roberts (1877- )   Elizabeth Williams (1879-1959)   Isaac Warner (1881- )  
m. Alice T. Butcher   m. Elizabeth B. Evans   m. Ellanor C. Thompson   m. Percy H. Clark   m. Caroline M. Henry

Miriam Williams (1888- )   m. Spencer Ervin

## Genealogy of the

# ROBERTS FAMILY

of Pencoyd, Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania





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